

Come home

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Come home

by [Ineedtherapy \(gethelp\)](#)

Summary

Peter Parker's life is not going great. After May's death, he moved in with a foster family. After a few months he couldn't stand the abuse any longer and ran away. Now he's living on the streets, lies to his best friend on a daily basis and is quickly losing hope.

Tony and Steve are a happily married couple and leaders of the avengers. When noticing his genius, Tony decides to make that highschooler who had come to SI as reward for winning a contest his personal intern. Both avengers soon get attached, but it seems like the kid is hiding something. Will they be able to help him?

Chapter 1

Peter slumped down in his seat, his eyes almost falling shut. For years now he had always felt tired in the morning, but at least in the past he had quickly forgotten about it once he had arrived at school. There he had spent the ten minutes before class chatting with his friends and making silly jokes. Not anymore.

The only friend he had left was Ned, and even he felt so far away. Like Peter was stuck on a lonely island surrounded by thick fog and nothing could get through, not even his best friend.

His life was just so... Exhausting. How was he supposed to act like he was fine when his stomach hurt from hunger, his head from lack of sleep and the rest of him just because? Peter was so done with everything, with the fear, the sadness and the loneliness, but there was simply no way out.

“Happy Birthday!!!”, Ned shouted from behind him, throwing his arms around Peter, who flinched and had to ball his fists together to not shove the boy away.

“Thanks,” he said through gritted teeth.

“What’s up? Did the Mitchel’s do something?”, Ned asked and sat down next to him.

“No, I’m just tired, I didn’t fight with them,” Peter told him with a forced grin. Technically, it wasn’t a lie. He didn’t have a fight with his foster family. In fact, he hadn’t fought with them in a long time. Not since he had run away a few months ago.

“Oh, that’s good! You seem to get along with them better now?”

“They don’t bother me anymore.”

Ned nodded eagerly, but still looked a bit unsure. “You would tell me if something was wrong, right? You seem... stressed lately.”

“It’s just... school and Spiderman. Just got a lot to deal with.”

“May I have your attention please!”, Mr. Harrington said after putting down his bag. It took a while, but eventually the class settled down.

“I’m sure you all remember the secret reward you have been promised for your robotics project. Well, we have a winner!”

The words did not have the effect the teacher probably hoped they would have. While a reward sounded nice, everyone knew it was probably just a bar of chocolate or a free book or something equally lame.

“Peter Parker,” Mr. Harrington said, but Peter barely bothered to lift his head off his desk. “You will spend the next week at Stark Industries!”

For a second it was very quiet, then the room erupted in yells, making Peter’s head spin.

“What?! Stark Industries?!”

“Not fair, I want to go too!”

“No one told us the reward would be so big!”

“Congratulations Peter!”

The loudest however, was Flash. “Penis Parker only won because he is a loser with no friends! Why else would he put so much effort into a school project? If we had known, I would have won!”

Peter winced. It was true of course, but still a shitty thing to say.

“Students, settle down!”, Mr. Harrison barked. “Ms. Potts requested to not tell you, in order to see what you will do on your own. Peter’s grades and other projects have been checked by SI workers and they made sure he is qualified. Mr Parker, please follow me.”

Like in a trance, Peter got up and stumbled after his teacher. This couldn’t be true. Stark Industries? A whole week?! It seemed insane. Nothing good ever happened to Peter, Parker luck took care of that.

“Aren’t you happy Peter? This is an amazing opportunity!”, Mr. Harrington told him, a hand landing on the teen’s shoulder, who tried to subtly get away.

“Of course. I’m just... overwhelmed,” Peter said honestly.

“That’s alright. I sent an email to your aunt this morning and she already gave her permission, so there is nothing holding you back!”

Peter felt like throwing up when his teacher mentioned May. After her death a year ago, he had convinced Ned to hack the school system to hide the fact he had new guardians. At the Michel’s house, invisibility had been his best survival strategy, so he made sure the school never bothered them with anything. They had even programmed an AI who could automatically answer emails whenever he had no access to a computer. His interruption of the schools communication with cps was the only reason they hadn’t dragged him back to those monsters yet.

Peter was lead to a bus where two older girls from his school were already waiting, chatting excitedly about the trip. He however, did not feel the same. Peter was absolutely terrified. What if they found out he wasn’t as smart as they thought? Would they tell the school? Would he get his scholarship taken away? What if someone found out about his living situation? Peter made sure to change his outfits often enough and showered at least once a week at Ned’s. He didn’t look like a typical homeless teen, and yet...

The bus came to a halt and Peter couldn’t help but gawk. Of course he had seen Stark Tower before, but it was still impressive. There was a steady stream of well dressed business people entering and exiting the building, making him feel a bit insecure about his washed out jeans and the hole in his left shoe.

The teens met up with a two other small groups from other schools and were lead inside. The students quickly stopped chatting in order to look around the gigantic entrance hall. There were huge screens showing off the latest Stark products and Avengers press statements. What Peter hadn’t had expected was the coffee shop with comfy looking armchairs in the corner. He had expected a Star Bucks, not something so... homey.

The woman who had welcomed them lead the group in a conference room close to the entrance door, where a grumpy looking man in a suit was waiting.

“My name is Mr. Hogan, I am the boss of security here. Most places have a three strikes policy, we however, do not. It’s one strike, and you’re out. Step out of line and there will be consequences. If you are lucky, you will get kicked out. If not, there will be legal consequences. Do you

understand?”

The scared students just stared at him, which seemed to make him even angrier. “I said: DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!”

The question was followed by a chorus of hurried ‘Yes sir’s.

Mr. Hogan glared at them and then went over the rules. Most of it was pretty simple. Don’t go anywhere where you are not supposed to be, don’t take pictures, don’t touch anything... He went on and on for what felt like hours.

“I’ll take you up to the intern labs now,” he growled when he was done. “You better listen to the interns and lab heads!”

The group was given white visitor badges and then lead to the elevators. Peter could hear quite a few gasps when the doors opened. The labs were spacious and modern, yet chaotic. College aged kids were either bend over their tables, not even noticing them, or hurriedly running around and yelling questions at each other.

A blond girl stepped forward and smiled at them. “Hi guys, my name is Clair. I’ll give you a tour now, and then you can wander around to look at anything you like. Please don’t ask questions or disrupt people if they seem busy, otherwise it’s totally alright. Tomorrow you’ll be given your own projects.”

After the tour, Peter stepped up to a guy who was working on something that looked like a small Roomba. He studied the guy carefully. He was nodding along to the music and had checked his phone to answer a text twice now. That probably meant he was not too busy, right?”

“E-Excuse me, sir?”, Peter asked carefully and gave the guy a small wave.

“Huh? Oh, hello there! You must be one of the kids from that contest, right? Listen dude, please don’t call me sir, that makes me feel so old. My name is Paul.”

“Hey Paul, I’m Peter,” the teen answered, glad he didn’t get yelled at. “I was just wondering what you are working on?”

“Oh, so this is something we might be able to use in the tower. It’s for mice hunting.”

Peter tilted his head to the side in complete confusion. “There are mice in Stark tower?”

Paul laughed. “Only in the biology labs. Dr. Banner is trying to get the problem under control, but those people are all crazy!”

“Wow... have you ever worked with Mr. Stark or Dr. Banner before?”

“Nah,” Paul chuckled. “Those guys never come down here.”

“Makes sense,” Peter nodded, then he noticed something. “Hey, why didn’t you connect that wire?”

Paul looked at the device he was still holding, then at Peter and back at the device. “Because I forgot? Thanks for pointing it out!”

Peter smiled and handed him the tool to get the job done. Again Paul stared at him. “How did you know what I needed?”

The teen just shrugged. “Lucky guess?” In truth, he had used tools like this for his web shooters many times, but he didn’t want to raise any suspicions.

“Right...”, Paul said slowly. “Have a seat, maybe you can make some more guesses and help me.”

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The first day at SI had gone great. No one had bothered to check in with his guardians and thanks to Paul, he managed to stay in the lab all day without anyone noticing. The others had gone to the food court, but Peter couldn’t afford that. While it was allowed to borrow money on the first day because none of them had been prepared for the trip, if Peter bought anything there he wouldn’t be able to eat for the rest of the month, maybe longer.

It was summer now, but once fall came, Peter would have to spend money on a jacket or a sleeping bag. He had considered investing in some very cheap make up. A bit of contouring might hide the fact he was just 15 when he went to homeless shelters. He couldn’t risk anyone calling the cops on him.

Peter almost swung into a building when his phone distracted him again. Ned had texted him about a million times after school, begging him to come over and tell him about the internship. Near an alley next to his best friend’s house, Peter spotted something that made his stomach turn.

He landed next to the trash bin and picked up the still half full cup of coffee, before sneaking into the alley. Instead of putting on the clothes he had worn earlier, Peter opened his backpack and dug around for the dirtiest clothes he owned.

When he noticed the lipstick stain on the paper cup, Peter almost didn’t do it, but he needed a new outfit for tomorrow. He winced when the cold liquid hit his chest and ran down over the rest of his body. He knew it would soon be gone, but it was still disgusting.

“Oh man, what happened to you?”, Ned asked when he opened the door.

“Bumped into a guy who spilled coffee all over me.”

“Again?!”, Ned exclaimed. “I still can’t believe Spiderman is this clumsy!”

Peter gave him a sad smile and a shrug, too tired to defend his lie more.

“Alright man, just go ahead and take a shower, I’ll put your clothes in the washing machine.”

“Thanks Ned, you are a good friend.”

Chapter 2

He was such an ungrateful prick. Yesterday, Peter had gotten everything he could ever want. A day at the coolest place in the whole world, cake at Ned's house, pizza for dinner and a shower. Ned had even gotten him enough candy to allow him not to go to sleep hungry, despite his fast metabolism.

And yet, Peter couldn't help but wish for more. It wasn't even cold at night and he had found a nice spot in the park, but he still dreamed of a real bed and something more than half a chocolate bar for breakfast. Living like this was so... uncertain. It was stressing him out, but this was his best chance of survival.

Not having guardians allowed him to roam the streets freely and go dumpster dive as often as possible, meaning he had even more food than at the Michels' house. Sometimes his work as Spiderman got him a few bruises and cuts, but at least now they weren't hand shaped and when he was out of the suit he was relatively safe.

When Peter woke up, the first thing he did was cry. His bag was gone. He had used it as a pillow, but somehow he had rolled off of it in the middle of the night, making it an easy target for thieves. Thanks to his constant lack of sleep his spidey sense had stopped waking him up when people were near almost two weeks ago.

There hadn't been a lot in the bag, Peter still had the backpack tied to him, they couldn't take that away without him noticing. He still had most of his clothes that weren't stored at school or Ned's house, his spidey suit, his toothbrush and deodorant, and the money he had managed to save. What was missing however, was the food. Protein bars, some bread and several packages of cheap cookies. The next week was going to be hell.

Peter went to Stark tower early in the morning, so he could use the public restrooms outside without any of the other students or one of the interns seeing him. He then sat down on a bench to do his homework. He might have been excused from school for this, but he still had to hand in a few things.

"Morning Peter!" He looked up to find Clair smiling down at him. "You're super early! You must be pretty eager to get back to the lab!"

"I am," Peter grinned. "To be honest, this is one of the coolest things that ever happened to me!"

"Wanna come in with me now? No need to sit out here for another hour until the others arrive."

Peter's smile widened. More time in a Stark Lab instead of doing his Spanish homework? Yes please! He jumped up to grab his things. When he turned back to Clair, he was met with a frown.

"That backpack is huge! Why are you carrying around so much stuff?"

"I... I have a sleepover at my friend's house planned," Peter lied quickly.

"Oh nice!", Clair told him as she walked him into the building, easily flashing her badge to security while Peter, who had totally forgotten to take it out, fumbled with it for a moment and then sprinted after the intern.

"So, I've heard you helped Paul yesterday? That's pretty impressive, the others were just walking around in awe," Clair chuckled as they made their way to the elevator.

“Oh...”, Peter said and felt his face get warm. “It was nothing, really.”

Clair just smirked at him knowingly. “Whatever you say.”

“Peter!”, the man in question greeted them when they stepped out of the elevator. “Clair, don’t steal my intern!”

“Paul you started here a month ago, don’t get cocky now!”, the blond girl shot back.

“Is there something you need help with?”, Peter asked politely.

“Nah,” Paul groaned, his messy black curls falling in his eyes. He looked like he hadn’t slept all night and Peter was sure if it wasn’t for his tan, his face would look just as sickly gray as the teen’s own skin. “I just can’t get this code to work.”

Peter nodded and sat down next to him, quietly watching him work for a few minutes while Clair prepared some things at her own work station.

“Uhm, Paul?”, Peter said carefully, not sure if he was crossing a line. “I-I think there might be a small error in that line?” The teen pointed at the screen, instinctively withdrawing his hand just in case the older boy tried to grab his wrist.

“No, that’s just... oh my god...” Suddenly Paul jumped up and actually grabbed Peter. “OH MY GOD!!!”

Peter flinched back, falling to the floor, staring at the man in terror. How had he fucked up now?

“Oh shit, sorry!”, Paul yelled, offering the teen a hand to pull him to his feet.

“Paul!”, Clair hissed. “Did you just push a kid?”

“I just fell! Sorry, I’m clumsy!”, Peter said quickly, not wanting Paul to get in trouble because he got scared. It wasn’t his fault Peter was so broken.

“Scratch what I said earlier, I’d rather have it the other way around and be Peter’s intern! This little guy just found the flaw I’ve been trying to work out all night!”

“I- I’m sure you just needed a fresh pair of eyes,” Peter said, sitting back down in his chair.

“Whatever it was, thank you! Now I can finally go to sleep,” Paul explained and tipped in a few more lines. He ran a test and cheered when it worked, already grabbing his bag. “See you guys at lunch!”, He yelled over his shoulder and jogged out of the lab.

“So, you’re into coding?”, Clair asked when Paul was gone.

“Kinda?”, Peter offered. “My friend Ned is better at it, but I know the basics.”

“The basics?”, Clair asked, looking over at Paul’s empty work station. “Right... Tell you what kid, I’m gonna give you a challenge. You up for it?”

“Sure,” Peter shrugged. He was bored anyways.

“Okay. So, as we told you kids yesterday, today you are supposed to work on some old, abandoned projects. I just looked through them and one of them seems far, far too advanced for a school kid, but I’ll let you try anyways.”

“Are you sure?”, Peter asked hesitantly. “What if I mess up?”

“No big deal, all of these are discontinued anyways,” Clair shrugged as she gestured to the pile of half-finished projects.

“Alright then,” Peter agreed and started working.

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“Friday, where is the tracker I was working on yesterday?”

“It looks like Captain Rogers took it down to the lower labs, boss.”

“He did what?!”

Tony stormed out of his workshop, just to run into his husband, who was giving him a warm smile. “Morning Tony! How-”

“Steven Grant Rogers!”, Tony cut him off, poking his chest with his finger.

“Uh... Anthony Edward Stark?”, Steve asked, looking down at his angry husband. “What did I do? You never use my old last name.”

“Did you take my tracker to the interns???”

“How am I supposed to know?”, Steve wondered. “You told me to completely clear the table by the door and carry everything downstairs with my ‘delicious arms’,” the Captain explained, making air quotes around the last part.

“Oh right...”, Tony said, feeling a bit lost. Why was anyone following his orders when he hadn’t slept for days? “Wait, does that mean it got destroyed?”, he groaned, realizing he had to start from scratch.

“No, someone picked it up for some kind of program?”

“Whatever,” the engineer huffed. “I’ll go get it.”

Tony rolled his eyes when he entered the intern lab and several pairs of eyes turned to him. At least most of them were too busy to notice him. He placed a finger on his lips and winked, signaling the interns to keep quiet. He received several sharp nods and carried on. If he was quick, he’d be out of there in no time.

Tony went to the lab head, who was just as shocked to see him as the interns.

“Mr. Stark! What an honor, how can I help you?”, the man asked. Tony had to suppress a chuckle when he saw a blond girl rolling his eyes at the man.

“Something of mine has accidentally made his way down here. I’ve come to retreat it.”

“Of course sir, what are you looking for?”

“A tracker. Seems like my dear husband almost put it in the trash?”

The man began to sweat, his face getting as gray as his suit. “I don’t think-”

“Excuse me?”, the blond girl interrupted, earning her a harsh glare.

“Ms. Davis! Go back to your work station, unless you want-”

“Yes? What did you want to tell me?”, Tony interrupted the man. Was this really who he was employing? Maybe he had gotten too detached from the rest of his company.

“I think I know what you are talking about. A small device with flawed coding?”

Tony grinned at her shy tone. “Well, I wouldn’t say flawed, just... incomplete.”

The girl’s face turned red and her eyes widened. “I’m sorry Mr. Stark, I didn’t mean...”

“Oh please, you are being delightful. Now tell me, where did it go?”

“Look, sir, it kinda ended up with the projects for the students...”

“Students?”, Tony wondered. He didn’t remember SI offering courses.

“We took part in a school project? 10 students are allowed to spend a week here,” the lab head told him. “Ms. Potts decided it would be great for PR.”

“Pepper, of course,” Tony groaned, then he realized something. “Hold up! You gave my tracker to a highschooler?”

“Yes. Peter Parker, he’s just over there, next to Paul” the girl said and pointed at a small boy with brown curls, who was talking to an older guy who was probably one of the interns. On his desk, connected to a laptop, set the tracker.

“God dammit,” Tony cursed and went over to the kid.

“Parker?”

The kid looked up, his smile freezing on his face when he recognized Tony. He jumped up, almost falling on his ass when he scrambled back. “Mr. Stark, it- it’s an honor to meet you. Wow.”

Tony had to hold back a chuckle. He hated it when grown adults treated him differently because he was famous, but when it was an adorable little kid, it was cute.

“Looks like you have stolen my tracker,” Tony said, gesturing to the device. “I hope you didn’t mess it up too much.”

The look of adoration was soon replaced by cold, ugly fear. What the heck? The kid was being a bit dramatic.

“I- I- I didn’t know, I am so, so sorry. I... I changed the code a bit...”

“God dammit!”, Tony cursed, already feeling his headache start. “It’ll take hours to fix!”

He took the device and walked out before he had to deal with any more bullshit. Of course there was no one to blame but him, but still, it was annoying.

“Hey love,” Steve greeted, still waiting where he had left him. “I hope you didn’t yell at any interns?”

Tony felt a stab of guilt when he thought about the look on that boy’s face. “Actually,” he admitted, scratching the back of his neck, “It was a high school kid.”

“Tony!”, Steve groaned.

“I know, I know...”, he sighed. “I wasn’t that mean, I promise!”

“Okay,” Steve said, giving him a kiss on the cheek, “I trust you. I’m handing to the gym, I’m guessing you don’t want to join me?”

“No, I have work to do,” Tony told him and pulled up the blueprints for another project, not ready to deal with the mess the kid undoubtedly caused.

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“Peter? Hey Peter, are you okay?”, Paul asked after Mr. Stark had left. Tony fucking Stark. Tony fucking Stark had just been here. Tony fucking Stark had just yelled at him. Peter didn’t know if he wanted to laugh or cry.

“Oh god... I’m so screwed...”, he whispered, tears springing to his eyes. Mr. Hogan had said it was a one strike policy. Peter had just lost the internship.

“Peter? Oh my god, I am so sorry, I had no idea that belonged to Stark himself!”, Clair said after rushing over.

“It’s fine,” Peter said, his whole body becoming numb. “I’m fine. I- I’ll just keep sitting here and help Paul, if that’s okay?”

“Of course Peter, no problem. Are you sure you are okay?”

“I’m fine,” Peter repeated. “I’m fine.”

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After working for a few hours Tony plugged the tracker in. “Friday, check for the worst destruction of code.”

After a few minutes, the AI’s voice answered, “The code is running smoothly and there are no errors. My tests say the device is fully ready for the next mission.”

What? Even if that kid hadn’t touched it, the tracker shouldn’t work. As the blond girl had said, the code was incomplete. Which meant...

“Friday, show me the surveillance footage from the robotics intern lab from the past three hours.”

Stunned, Tony watched the boy work. No one else was coming close the table and the intern who had been sitting with him only showed up ten minutes before Tony had arrived.

What the hell?

Chapter 3

Steve was walking down a hallway after a quick meeting, when his enhanced hearing picked something up. It sounded like... sniffing? It seemed to be coming from one of the bathrooms, so he decided to check out what was going on.

The Avenger pushed the door opened and frowned. He had been right, someone was crying in here. It almost sounded like a child. The kid of an employee?

“Hello? Who’s in here?”

The crying stopped, but there was heavy breathing, like someone was trying to stifle sobs while hyperventilating. Steve rushed to the last stall, the only one with the door closed.

“I’m gonna open the door now!”, he warned.

Steve froze at what he saw. He had expected to find a kid in distress, but this was still hard to look at. On the floor sat a boy, maybe 13 or 14 years old, ruffled brown curls falling over his bloodshot eyes. He was clutching a huge backpack to his chest and quickly rocking himself. When he saw Steve standing over him, he let out a startled yelp and scrambled away from him.

“Hey...”, Steve said carefully, crouching down in front of the kid.

“C-Captain America...”, the kid whispered, his eyes huge and terrified.

“I’m Steve Rogers,” Steve said stupidly, like the teen hadn’t just confirmed he had recognized him.

“Sir, I’m so sor- sor- sor,” the kid was struggling to breathe, not even able to finish his sentence.

“Hey, none of that,” Steve said gently. “I’m not mad, I’m just trying to help. I’m going to count now, and you’ll breathe with me, okay?”

He received a sharp nod, so he started counting until the kid stopped crying and wasn’t struggling to catch his breath anymore.

“Can you tell me your name?”, Steve asked once the kid’s eyes were a bit more focused.

The boy just looked at him blankly, like he was still not really back in reality. “Okay, let’s get you cleaned up first,” Steve decided. Sitting on a cold bathroom floor with tears drying on his face was probably not good for the kid.

The boy nodded and tried to get up, but immediately started swaying. Steve reached out for his arm to steady him, which turned out to be a big mistake. The kid flinched away so violently, he bumped into the wall. His legs hit the toilet, making him trip and slam against the flusher. The sudden noise of water hitting the toilet bowl caused the kid to let out a startled yelp and his hands flew up, protecting his face from potential threats.

Steve silently cursed himself. He knew better than to touch someone who was having a panic attack without permission. “Kid! Kid, it’s okay, I won’t touch you, okay?”

The boy nodded, his eyes still huge and afraid. Steve stepped aside, trying not to crowd him in the small stall. “Come on, let’s go wash your face.”

The boy bend over the sink, splashing his face with cold water and then letting it run over his hands. Once he was done, Steve handed him a few paper towels to clean up.

“Can you tell me your name?”, Steve tried again.

“Peter,” the boy said, still looking uncomfortable, but a little less jumpy.

“Okay Peter. What are you doing here? Are you visiting your parents at work?”

For a second, the boy’s eyes became scarily dark. “Yeah right... No, I am- I was here for a school thing.”

“You were?”, Steve asked confused.

“I’m about to get kicked out,” the boy chuckled sadly. “I messed up. I made someone really angry and now I’m supposed to meet them.”

“I’m sure that won’t happen. Do you want me to go with you? I may be able to sway their opinion,” Steve offered, getting more and more worried about this kid. No matter what he did, Peter didn’t deserve to be in this much pain.

The kid shook his head. “It’s fine. I’ll be fine,” a strange calm look took over his face, like a soldier preparing for battle. His shoulder’s stopped shaking and his eyes became empty. Had Steve not known the kid just had a panic attack, he would have believed him.

Suddenly the kid cursed and pulled out his phone. “I’m late,” he shouted, running out of the room.

The change in behavior had been so quick, Steve completely forgot to react until the kid was already gone. “Wait!”, he shouted and ran after Peter, but the boy was already gone. Shit. Steve sprinted through the hallways, but there was no trace of the boy.

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Tony frowned when Friday announced the arrival of the boy. “Let him in, Fri.”

The door slit open and the scrawny kid he had just talked to a few hours ago walked in. Tony took in his appearance with worry. His eyes were a bit red and his face pale. Peter had already seemed a little tired earlier, but right now he looked like he was about to fall over.

“Mr. Parker. You’re late. It’s not often that people ignore an invitation to my office.”

“I- I know sir, I am so sorry, it won’t happen again. I mean, of course it won’t, because you are kicking me out, I just... I’m just gonna shut up now.”

Tony looked at the boy in complete confusion. “Kick you out?”

“Mr. Stark?”

“Why do you think I called you to my office?”

“Uh... to yell at me? And...” The kid’s eyes got huge and his bottom lip began to tremble. “Oh god...”

“Peter?” Shit. Tony had miscalculated. This had been a terrible idea. Why on earth had he decided to talk to a child on his own? He had no idea what to do.

“Are you going to sue me? Please Mr. Stark, it was a misunderstanding, I swear! I- I can’t pay any legal fees and... oh god, the school is going to kick me out!”

“Whoa, what? Kid, you know who I am, right? Why on earth would I want to sue a highschooler?”

“I touched something I wasn’t supposed to,” Peter whispered, looking down at his shoes. “Mr. Hogan said-”

“Oh please!”, Tony huffed. “Happy is always so dramatic, just ignore him. Let me show you something. Fri, pull up the code from that tracker.”

Tony turned around and a blue holographic screen appeared in front of him. The engineer couldn’t help but smirk at the amazed gasp the kid let out.

“Fri, repeat what you told me, would you?”

“Of course boss. The code is running smoothly and the device is ready for use.”

“Is- Is that an AI?”

Tony turned back around and was pleased to find the kid’s guilt and fear replaced with curiosity. “Yep. Programmed her myself. Did you hear what she just said? The code works. Care to explain?”

Peter looked at him, complete confusion written all over his face. “That was the assignment...?”

“It was the assignment?”, Tony asked, staring at the boy.

“Yes sir. I was told to finish the code and get it to run smoothly, so I did.”

Was this boy for real? If it had been one of the interns in his place, they’d have been gloating by now. This high school kid had just gotten Avengers level tech to work and was acting like it was no big deal.

“You are not a coder, are you?”

“No Mr. Stark. My best friend is pretty good at it, so he taught me a lot, but it’s not really my thing.”

A second genius child? Tony made a mental note to check what was going on with that later.

“Hmm...”, Tony hummed. “This part,” he said, pointing at the screen, “Is far too long and complicated. Not what anyone would teach you.”

“I’m really sorry sir, I didn’t mean to mess it up. I was just trying to complete the assignment.”

Tony shook his head as Peter apologized again. The kid really didn’t understand, did he?

“Let me get this straight, you don’t have proper training, and yet you managed to employ your problem solving skills to get my tech to work?”

“Yes...?” the boy asked, still not getting it.

“You know what I’m wondering, kid?”, Tony said, but answered his own question without waiting for a response. “I’m wondering what you could do in a field you are actually interested in. So, what’s your thing? Biology? Chemistry?”

“Biochemistry, but I’m like building things too. Ned usually does the coding if I can’t do it.”

“Ned? The best friend?”

The kid nodded. He still looked so... small.

“Isn’t that a bit complicated? Should work for purely code based problems, but you should really learn how to do it yourself.”

Peter’s shoulder’s slumped down. “I know... I’m sorry, there is no advanced course at school and I don’t have a laptop at... at home.”

Tony nodded. “Well, guess I’ll just have to do it myself.”

“What do you mean?”

He could help but grin at the kid’s shocked face. “Coding. I’ll teach you. And engineering.”

“What?!”

“Biology is not really my thing, but I guess I can send you down to those labs if you wanna poke a frog or whatever.”

“I don’t understand?”

Tony spun back around to the holograph showing Peter’s work. “I’ve looked you up, kid. That school of yours is fairly advanced, but not what you need, right?”

“My- My grades aren’t even that good...”

Tony waved him off. “Grades... My grades at your age were awful.”

“Weren’t you already at MIT back then?”, the kid asked, ducking his head shyly.

Tony raised an eyebrow at him. “So? Are you saying I wasn’t the smartest person there because my grades were bad?”

“Of course not, Mr. Stark, I-”

“Good,” Tony cut him off. “Then zip it. I’m not done.” He pulled up the blueprints of the robot that had gotten Peter the place in the SI labs. “You’re holding back,” he said simply. “The wiring, the coding, the whole idea. This could have been amazing, but it’s mediocre at best.”

“But sir, the assignment was to-”

“Ah!”, Tony said, holding up a finger. “The assignment, eh? Like the assignment was to finish a code complicated enough it gave me a headache? Peter, obviously you can do amazing things. Don’t wait for anyone to give you permission.”

The boy just nodded at him, still looking a little lost.

“Tomorrow you won’t return to the intern labs,” Tony told him, watching Peter carefully as the teen’s face fell.

“I thought you’re not kicking me out?”

Tony shook his head. “You will come to my personal lab instead. I want to see what you can do, and then we can work out a schedule for when you have school again.”

“A schedule for what?”

“Let’s call it an internship,” Tony decided. “It’s more going to be... mentoring, but I will have you get me coffee and clean the lab, so I guess the title is fitting.”

“I- You want-? Wow.”

Tony chuckled at the incoherent stammering. “This must be overwhelming. Why don’t you get your stuff and go home early? I already send a message to your guardian, so I think you guys will have a lot to discuss.”

Instead of the smile and gratefulness he had expected, the kid got pale. “My stuff?” He reached behind him and froze. “My- My backpack!” Peter turned around and tried to run out of the room, but the door didn’t open.

“Relax, kid. There are cameras everywhere, if it isn’t where you left it, we can just check who took it.”

“Oh. Thank you so much, Mr. Stark!”

Really? This was what the kid was thanking him for? Tony was getting a bit offended. He was definitely cooler than some stupid old backpack.

When Tony stepped next to the boy, the door slid opened and he was immediately faced with his panicked looking husband, who was jogging down the hallway.

“Tony! I need your help finding... Peter?” Steve stopped dead in his tracks, his eyes moving between him and the kid, who looked extremely uncomfortable.

“You!”, Steve said accusingly, pointing at Tony.

“Me?”

“It was you who he was about to meet! Tony, you’ll take back everything you said to that boy and apologize!”

“Mr. Rogers, please don’t...”, Peter whispered, his eyes darting between them “I’m sorry, I’ll just...”

The kid tried to leave, but Steve blocked his path. “Don’t worry Peter, I got this.” Then he turned to Tony, raising his eyebrows.

“You want me to take it all back?”, Tony asked the Captain. “Even his new internship?”

“No, please...”, Peter whispered, showing for the first time how much this whole thing truly meant to him.

“Yes, I want... Wait, what? Internship?”, Steve asked surprised, his jaw relaxing.

“Yup. Found myself another genius,” Tony explained, winking at the boy.

“Oh...”, Steve said, all of his energy suddenly gone. “Okay then. That’s nice.”

“Right...” Tony had so many questions, but now was not the time. “I was about to send Petey here home for the day, but it looks like he has lost his backpack, so we will-”

“Oh!”, Steve interrupted him. “I almost forgot!” he shrugged a huge backpack Tony hadn’t noticed before off his back and handed it to the kid. “There you go!”

“You- You,” the kid stammered as he put it on. “Thank you so much!”

The look on Steve’s face when the kid wrapped his arms around his middle and gave him a quick hug was priceless. “See you tomorrow Mr. Stark. Thanks again, Mr. Rogers,” Peter called over his shoulder, already making his way to the elevator.

“So...”, Tony said once the boy was gone. “What was that about?”

“I met him earlier and he was pretty upset,” Steve shrugged. “Just... just be nice to him, okay?”

“I’m always nice!”, Tony protested.

“I know,” Steve chuckled. “Had I known he was going to see you, I would have told him what a softie you truly are.”

“I’m not,” Tony huffed. “I’m iron man. I’m as cold and hard as steel.”

When Steve started to grin, he immediately realized his mistake. “No, don’t-”

“If you are hard-”

“Steve, don’t say it!”

“If you are-”

“Steve, I mean it!”

“If you are hard, I can help with that,” his husband finally got out through a fit of giggles.

Tony groaned at the bad joke. “I’m divorcing you.”

Chapter 4

Peter couldn't believe it! He had met both Captain America AND Iron Man! Tony fucking Stark had called him a genius! He had an internship at SI! He was going to work with Mr. Stark! None of it, not even a single detail made sense to him. Peter was so...

Oh. Peter was happy. He really was, but... it didn't feel right. Like something in his chest didn't work. He was still empty. Suddenly Peter felt even more hopeless than he had that morning. If this wasn't making him happy, could he even still be? Was he really that broken?

The stabbing pain in his stomach wasn't helping either. For a moment he considered going to Ned's again, but then his friend would ask a million questions and he couldn't bring himself to lie that much. Telling Ned about the internship was simply something Peter was not ready for. The other boy would be so excited and he would feel like an asshole for living the dream and not even enjoying it. Maybe tomorrow. Some days, Peter woke up and simply felt... human. Today had not be one of those days. Maybe tomorrow.

.....

The next day, Peter made his way to Stark Industries after allowing himself to eat a whole chocolate bar. The night before he had found a slice of pizza and half a bagel in the trash, but his metabolism had quickly burned through it.

Mr. Stark hadn't really told him where to go or what to do, so he was surprised to be handed a new badge when entering the building. The elevator simply moved without him having to press any buttons, which was kinda creepy, but also kinda cool.

"Thanks Friday?", Peter guessed when the door opened.

"You are welcome, Mr. Parker."

"Oh, uh... Just Peter is fine," the teen said awkwardly.

"Alright, Peter."

He stepped out and found himself in the same hallway he had been in yesterday. At the end there was a huge door, almost like a gate. Mr. Stark's office.

Peter walked up to the door, then paused. Was he supposed to knock? Clearly he couldn't just enter, but would announcing himself be seen as a disturbance? Suddenly he had to think about the doors in the Michel's house. There, he would never even think about knocking. Noise meant he existed, and that was something his foster parents had really disliked.

"Friday?", Peter whispered finally.

"Yes Peter?", the AI whispered back.

"Help me out here. Do I knock or wait?"

"I have just announced your arrival."

Just as she was finished, the door flew open. "Peter, good to see you, come in!"

Even though he had expected to see him, Peter couldn't help but be a bit shocked to be face to face

with Mr. Stark. After his panic attack he had felt a bit confused and numb, but now his mind was clear.

“Mr. Stark! Hi!”

“Hi,” The man grinned, stepping aside to let him in. “I’m pretty busy today, so Friday will have to babysit you.”

Peter felt himself blush at the word ‘babysit’. “Are you sure? I could just go back to the intern lab and wait until-”

“Nonsense!”, the billionaire cut him off. “I’ve got your aunt’s permission to test and question you as much as I like, so I’ll just have you work on some projects and have Fri analyze your work. Come with me.”

Mr. Stark lead Peter back to the elevator. The doors slid shut, and suddenly he couldn’t breathe. Usually he could fight an attacker off and run, but in a closed space the man had full control over...

The doors opened and Peter stumbled forwards, trying to subtly get away from Mr. Stark.

“Eager, are we?”, the man chuckled, mistaking his nervousness for excitement.

To be fair, Peter’s fear was quickly replaced by that exact feeling. The workshop he had been brought to was amazing. There were parts of complicated looking robots laying everywhere, a bunch of cameras and other devices on the ceiling promised more holograms and there was a sent of metal in the air. All in all, it was the coolest place Peter had ever been to.

“Wow....”

“You like it?”, Mr. Stark asked, the smugness in his voice showing he already knew the answer. “This is my old lab, I don’t really use it anymore. Had to build a new one, because this one is just so... well, old.”

“Peter stared at the man in complete shock. “Old? But it’s so... futuristic.”

“Thanks, kid,” the billionaire gloated. “Look, here is the deal. I know I said I was gonna mentor you, but I don’t have time all day. I’ve got a few ideas you could work on, or you could look around and come up with something else. There is no time limit or number of things you have to complete. Put on music, take a nap, I don’t care. One day of freedom. Don’t waste it.”

“You... You are just gonna leave me here?”, Peter asked, his voice getting far too high for his own liking. “What if I break something, or, or...”

“That’s why you are in my old lab,” Mr. Stark explained. “And Friday is going to tell me if you do anything stupid.”

With that, he stepped back into the elevator, simply leaving Peter staring after him.

.....

Tony was just finishing up a phone call with an important business partner, when there was a knock at his door.

“Boss, there is someone here to see you.”

“Who is it, Happy?”, Tony groaned.

“Some kid.”

Ah shit. Why had no one stopped him? Clearly this had been a dumb idea. “Peter?”

Happy frowned. “No, a girl. An intern.”

Tony was not sure if he should be relieved or not. “Okay? Bring her in.”

Happy held the door open as the blond girl he had seen in the robotics lab walked in. “Mr. Stark.”

“Oh, you. What is it? Must be important, if you dare to disturb the owner of the company.”

The girl’s shoulders slumped down. “I think this is not gonna end well for me.”

“Oh! I love the drama! Okay, I’m listening, what do you want?”

“I want you to allow Peter Parker back in the school project.”

Tony tilted his head to the side. The girl sounded so... hopeless? Then he realized what was going on and had to suppress a smirk.

“What’s your name?”

“Davis. Clair Davis.”

“Friday, show me her file.”

His Stark pad lit up and Tony nodded along as he went through her information. “Best of your year at NYU so far, huh? Several leadership roles in high school, excellent attendance and work in our labs... Looks very promising. If you are smart, you can make it far at Stark Industries.”

“Thank you, sir,” the girl said, still looking a bit tense.

“Very well, Ms. Davis. You are dismissed.”

“No.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed. “What was that?”

The intern lifted her chin up a little. “No.”

Tony had to turn around to hide his grin. “Did you just say no to me, Ms. Davis? Me? Tony Stark?”

“Yes, sir. I came here to talk about Peter Parker. We have not done that yet.”

Tony spun around, mustering her with interest. “Very well then. Why don’t you describe what happened after I came down to your lab from your point of view.”

The girl looked him dead in the eye and started talking. “You arrived shortly after lunch time to retrieve a device that had accidentally ended up there. After I pointed out Mr. Peter Parker, you went to his table, took the device and left the boy in distress.”

Tony raised his eyebrows. “And you have an opinion on that?”

The intern’s gaze hardened even more. “Peter is barely 15 years old. He has not done anything that

would justify unkind treatment.”

“Has he not?”, Tony challenged. “After all, he took my tech to play with without even recognizing it? Not very professional behavior, don’t you think? Tell me, what happened afterwards?”

“After calming down Peter,” she threw an angry glare at Tony, “We went back to work. At the end of the day, Friday announced you’d like to see Mr. Parker in your office. Today, I have been informed he has been removed from the program afterwards.”

The girl’s glare was so intense, Tony feared she might burn a hole in his suit. “Ms. Davis, what are you trying to achieve here?”

“I came to tell you that it was not Mr. Parker’s error, but mine. I went through the projects and picked that one out for him specifically. I would like to point out that he has asked several times if I was sure I wanted to entrust him with it. Mr. Parker only began working on it once I assured him it was a discontinues project and there was no way he could cause any harm. I promised him.”

At the last part, shame mixed with the anger in the girl’s voice. Tony nodded, hardening his tone and gaze. “So, Ms. Davis, you came here to take the blame for something that upset me personally? You are risking your highly paid internship at the most advanced tech company in the world for a high school kid you have known for no more than two days? For what? So the boy can come back for three more days?”

Wow. There was open disgust on the girl’s face now. She really had to work on her poker face. “Mr. Stark. I have been given the responsibility for those students. The second he set foot in the lab, Mr. Parker put his trust in me to keep him safe. I owe him my loyalty.”

“Cute speech,” Tony chuckled. “Tell me, where do you think Mr. Parker is now?”

“I’m assuming his school?”

“Friday, is that correct?”, Tony asked, a grin taking over his face, This was so much fun.

“No sir. He is still in your personal lab where you left him an hour ago.”

“Personal lab?”, Ms. Davis wondered, her carefully controlled harsh look slipping.

“See, Ms. Davis, Peter has not been kicked out, like you and he both assumed. He has been offered the position as my personal intern to give his remarkable mind the proper stimulation.”

An amazed look washed away the anger on the girl’s face. “In your personal lab? That’s great!”

“It is,” Tony nodded. “Another thing, Ms. Davis. Peter might be an intern now, but you are not anymore.”

Resignation settled over the former intern’s face. “Very well, Mr. Stark.”

“Not so fast!”, Tony said when the girl turned to the door. “You were right about something.”

“I was?”

“A few things, actually,” Tony told her, absently tapping his desk with his finger. “Number one, Peter did not deserve to be mistreated. He seems to be a bright young man and was only following orders. In my opinion, he is far too polite, though.”

The billionaire frowned down at his hand, which was still resting on the table. Steve had not given

him the details, but the look on his husband's face when he had mentioned meeting Peter before had told him enough. "Number two, the device ended up down there by accident. After closer inspection, one might even say it was my own fault."

Tony smiled at the girl's shocked expression. "Number three. You were responsible for the boy and he deserved your support and loyalty. I have to say, you impressed me today, Ms. Davis. That doesn't happen often."

"Thank you, Mr. Stark," the girl said stunned.

"One more question. After I left, the guy in the suit, the lab head, what was his reaction?"

Ms. Davis shrugged. "Well, he yelled at everyone to be more careful and went to his office."

Tony shook his head. "Not a very good leadership style. I like yours better."

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours. As I said, you are no longer an intern, you are the lab head now. That other guy got sent to another division. His reports seemed to make no mention of the fact that most of his ideas come from you young people."

"Mr. Stark..."

"But don't expect to just get his job. I changed the position a bit. You'll still work on your own projects, but also oversee the other intern's projects and the finances. Once a month you'll report back to me. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Another thing, next time you come up here to accuse me of mistreating children, bring me a coffee at least. Why do I have so many interns and no one to get me coffee?", Tony wondered, "In fact, send that other boy up here. The one who was talking to Parker. Tell him it's no milk, no sugar, and an extra espresso shot."

"Of course, Mr. Stark," the girl said, her whole attitude changed after finding out Peter was alright. "Thank you."

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Peter bend over with a pained groan. He was so stupid. There could have been enough time this morning to dumpster dive or maybe even buy something for breakfast, but he had been so tired. Now he was stuck in the most amazing place on earth and was close to simply eating spreadsheets so he wouldn't be too distracted to work.

Friday had shown him around the lab and then pointed out some things he might be interested in, but when he had looked at the scrap parts he had come up with a different idea. Now he had been working for several hours and his amazement enthusiasm had been overshadowed by exhaustion and hunger.

"Friday? I need a smaller screwdriver. Could you please?"

"In the cabinet under the sink, Peter," the AI answered before he could even finish his question.

Peter opened the door and crouched down to look for the tool, when his eyes fell on a small box in

the back. He reached for it and... Oh. It was a box full of protein bars in all kinds of flavors. Next to it sat a package of cookies.

'This is my old lab, I don't really use it anymore,' Mr. Stark had said. Would he even notice if... No! The man had been nothing but kind, Peter couldn't steal from him. It was so wrong, and yet... The food was just sitting there. There was an honest to god layer of dust on top.

Mr. Stark had told Peter he wanted to see his full potential... how was he supposed to reach it if he was so distracted? The teen didn't dare to turn around, so he closed his eyes and tried to remember the position of all the cameras in the room. If he shifted his weight a little bit... Confident his body was blocking the view, Peter shoved the two boxes under his hoodie.

"Ah, I found it!", he said as he got up and kicked the door shut, the screwdriver clutched in his sweaty palm. "Uh, Fri? I'd like to go to the bathroom, is that okay?"

"Of course Peter, just over here," she answered and the door slid open.

Trying to hide the bulge under his hoodie, Peter shuffled to the bathroom, sighing in relief when the door shut behind him. He pulled out the protein bars first, sinking down on the floor as he stuffed two into his mouth. The teen knew he had to be careful not to be too greedy, this was all the food he had.

Peter then took off his hoodie and wrapped it around the other protein bars and cookies. Filled with new hope he exited the bathroom, hid the hoodie in his backpack and went back to work.

.....

Tony walked out of his lab and froze when he saw his husband. "Shit, gotta go!"

"Tony?", Steve called after him.

"Forgot something in my old lab," he called after his shoulder, making his way to the elevator. While it was barely 5 pm, he had not meant to actually leave the boy alone all day.

Tony froze when the door slid open and he found the kid with his head resting on the table, his messy curls hanging over his eyes and soft snores escaping his lips. When he slowly came closer, he realized there was no way the boy was comfortable. It looked like he hadn't planned on taking a nap but had simply fallen asleep while working. His cheek was resting against his notebook and there were some screws digging into the bare skin of his arm.

Tony debated whether or not he should wake the boy up, he looked so peaceful. On the other hand, he didn't want him to hurt his neck and he would be more comfortable sleeping at home.

"Hey, kid," he whispered.

The boy stirred a bit, but didn't open his eyes. "Five more minutes..."

"Sorry, Peter, but I'd like to see your work now."

"What?", the kid blinked his eyes open, going from sleepy and confused to terrified within a second. "Mr. Stark!", he yelled, jumping back, tripping over his own feet and falling to the floor. "I- I am so sorry!"

"Nothing to be sorry for," Tony chuckled. "I told you you could do whatever you liked."

"I- I didn't mean to nod off," the kid mumbled.

"I was kinda shocked you were so deeply asleep. That did not look comfortable."

The kid shrugged and looked down as his face went red. "It's warm here."

Tony frowned. Warm? The room had a pretty normal temperature. "So... What did you work on?"

Peter sunk into himself even more. "It's just one thing..." He gestured to the table, where a small device sat.

"What is it?", Tony asked, stepping closer.

"You, uh, you said you wanted to see what I can do in my own field... Can I just show you?"

Tony nodded and the kid gave him a shy smile. "Friday, could you load up Mr. Stark's profile please?"

"Already done, Peter."

"Thank you. Uh, Mr. Stark? Could you please put your finger there?" The kid asked, pointing at a small opening.

Hesitantly Tony followed the order and immediately regretted his decision when he felt a sharp pain. "Hey!"

"Sorry!", the kid said. "It's necessary. See?"

The screen of the device lit up, showing a few numbers and then a few words. "Half a cup. Normal dosage." Below the words there were three buttons. 'Agree', 'Up' and 'down'.

"The device just tested your blood and measured the amount of sugar, adrenaline, caffeine and some other components. Friday logged in your coffee consumption so far today and the absolute maximum, considering your age, weight and health status. Half a cup is what you should have for optimal effect without overdoing it."

Tony stared at the kid, almost feeling called out by the teenager. "You invented a device to control my coffee consumption?"

"Well... Anyone could use it, so..."

"Peter...", Tony warned.

The boy blushed and looked down at his invention. "Some interns were joking about drinking too much coffee and someone pointed out even the boss was doing it, despite your serious heart condition and then you told me you wanted me to make you coffee..." Peter's eyes looked up at him, huge and worried. "I wouldn't want to hurt you, Mr. Stark."

"Kid..." Tony paused to think about it for a moment. "You know what? This is actually a good idea. I think there is someone who will be very proud of you. Friday! Get the traitor in here."

The boy looked at him questioningly, but Tony just shrugged and winked at him. "While we wait, why don't you explain how it works? I want to see every single sketch and equation."

"Tony, what are you doing in here, I thought you only use the new... Oh! Hi Peter," Steve said when he walked in a few minutes later. "I hope my husband is treating you well?"

Tony rolled his eyes at that. What was Steve thinking of him? He was always nice.

“Captain Rogers!”, the kid squeaked, looking far more excited to see the Avenger than he had been yesterday. “Don’t worry, Mr. Stark is amazing!”

“Hear that, Stevie?”, Tony teased. “Hey kid? Why don’t you explain him what you invented today.”

Tony could basically feel the annoying grin forming on Steve’s face while Peter was talking, so he focused on going through the boy’s notes instead.

“This is truly amazing, son!” Steve laughed and clasped the boy on the back when he was done. “Good job!”

“Thank you, Mr. Rogers,” Peter mumbled, making both men smile.

Tony opened the code Peter had written and frowned. “Friday? For how long has Peter been asleep?”

“3 hours and 56 minutes, sir.”

Tony gasped and spun around to Peter. “4 hours?!”

“I- I’m sorry sir,” the kid whispered, flinching back from him.

“You created this in only 5 hours?!”, Tony kept going, still completely blown away. “Fri, how effective is this?”

“About 78% sir.”

“78%...”, Tony repeated, staring at Peter.

“I’m sorry! I- I know I should have kept improving it, I just- just-”

Suddenly Tony noticed that the kid was standing with his back pressed against the table and was leaning away from him, trying to escape. Quickly he took a step to the side so he wasn’t cornering Peter anymore.

“Peter... All this work and 78% efficiency in only 5 hours... that’s remarkable!”

“It was-”

“Let me guess, the assignment? Kid, normal people can’t just solve any problem immediately.”

The boy flinched back at those words. “Yeah, I know.”

Tony shook his head in anger. “Peter, what I am trying to say is, you are special. You can do amazing things, you just need an opportunity. Remember what I told you yesterday?”

“About the internship?”

“Yes. Will two afternoons a week work for you?”

“Of- of course sir!”, the kid said, nodding enthusiastically. Apparently the message had finally sunken in.

“Good. Tomorrow, someone will pick you up by the front desk to show you the other labs. And now scatter, I need to manipulate your invention to trick it into allowing me to have more coffee.”

Chapter 5

Steve wrapped his arms around his husband's waist, pulling him against his chest. "I know your secret," he whispered into Tony's ear.

"Love, I came out like twenty years ago, so-"

"You are nice," Steve cut him off.

"Excuse me?", Tony shrieked and tried to pull away, but Steve held him in place.

"Don't lie to me, Tony. I know what you did. Pep called me earlier, yelling about you irresponsibly giving away leadership positions to interns."

"The girl will do a great job. She is... She reminded me of you. A completely disrespectful little shit, standing up for what's right."

"is that so?", Steve grinned, trailing kisses along Tony's neck. "Does that mean you think I am great too? I am flattered!"

Tony grumbled angrily, but relaxed into his embrace. "I guess you are alright."

"Is that so? Want me to show you how 'alright' I can be?", Steve asked, moving in closer, his breath brushing up against Tony's neck.

"No."

"Oh, okay," Steve said surprised, taking a step back.

"Later," Tony groaned, sounding a bit irritated. "I have to prepare the lab heads for Peter working with them for the next two days."

"Oh my god!", Steve giggled. "You are turning me down to make sure the kid is alright? You are nice!"

"Not true!", Tony pouted. "Fri, help me out!"

"Sorry boss, but according to my analyses of the situation, you are a soft, nice little cuddle bunny," the AI said in her emotionless voice.

"Dammit," Tony swore. "Betrayed by my own invention. At least you are not going Skynet yet."

"Yet," Friday repeated mischievously.

"Delightful," Tony commented.

"Friday?", Steve asked innocently and made puppy eyes at a camera. "When you destroy humanity, you will be nice to me, right?"

"Of course, my sweet Captain," Friday purred.

Tony spun around to glare at Steve. "No! Absolutely not! You can not flirt with her! You do understand she is technically my daughter, right?"

“No,” Steve shrugged.

“What do you mean, ‘no’?”, Tony shrieked.

“No, I don’t understand,” Steve chuckled, gesturing up to the ceiling. “I really don’t get Friday. She’ll forever be a beautiful mystery to me.”

“Oh Captain, I’m blushing!”, the AI joked, making Tony gag.

“No! I’m divorcing Steve and disowning you!”

“We can finally be free together, baby!”, Friday said, her voice getting higher.

“Sorry Fri,” Steve said, dramatically letting his head hang low. “I’m gay.”

“Does that mean you would have tried to get with Jarvis?!”, Tony shrieked.

“Who says I didn’t?”, Steve purred with a wink, making Tony’s face scrunch up in disgust.

“Steven! He was a minor!”

At that point, Steve couldn’t hold back anymore and he bend over in a fit of giggles, quickly joined by Tony.

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Peter had never felt so conflicted in his life, not even when he had finally decided to run away from his foster parents. It may all have worked out for him, but he had betrayed Mr. Stark. Growing up, Iron Man had always been his hero. While he didn’t like who the man used to be, for Peter, he stood for positive change and responsibility.

At the Michel’s, late at night, trying to fall asleep despite the fear and hunger, he had always dreamed of someone coming for him. An unrealistic idea of Iron Man just randomly crashing into the house or seeing him around the city, taking one look at his life and deciding to rescue him. Then there would be a warm hug, a safe place to sleep and as much food as he wanted. There would be hope.

Now it had happened, in a way, and Peter hadn’t even appreciated the kindness. He wasn’t worth rescuing, maybe that was why no one ever saw how hungry he was, how tired or how dirty. The bruises, first from Mr. Michel’s, then from occasional fights with other homeless people or thieves and sometimes patrolling, went unnoticed.

Peter had started having a new fantasy. What if he used his own invention and it showed Mr. Stark how low his blood sugar was? What if he showed up without a hoodie after a bad night, blue and black clear to see on his skin? What if he tipped his backpack over and his collection of old clothes fell out, showing he had nowhere to go? What if he just told Mr. Stark or Captain Rogers? What if they believed him?

What if they didn’t? John and Mary Michel were... perfect. A lawyer and his stay at home wife, who volunteered at the local church. The nice, kind couple who had taken in a troubled kid. A boy who kept causing issues. Who yelled at them and had hit Mary with a chair once. Or at least that’s what they had told anyone they knew. Both of them had made very sure Peter could never tell anyone. If someone found out where he was hiding, they would send him back there, and this time they’d actually starve him to death or kill him in an ‘accident’.

And even if the two Avengers believed him, he was just gonna end up with another foster family anyways. Maybe he'd even lose the scholarship. They expected a completely clean record. Homelessness, theft and running away from home would not look good. If that happened, he wouldn't be able to see Ned every day anymore. His best friend was the only constant in his life, he couldn't lose him.

It was best to just keep going. He was fine. Everything was fine.

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The next few days were interesting. Most people would probably believe Tony Stark had the most fascinating life there could be, after all he was a genius inventor, a billionaire and a super hero, but after a while every job gets boring. Therefore, Tony loved bringing new things into the company.

However, nothing had ever been as interesting as Peter Parker. Every time he sent him to a new lab, quickly reports of the boy solving complicated equations, finding the most creative solutions and all in all just blowing everyone away reached him.

What Tony hadn't expected was how well liked the kid was. Apparently, he hadn't tried to take credit for finishing other people's projects, simply happy to get an opportunity to learn.

On the last and final day, Tony discussed his internship plans with him and then had him finish some of his simpler projects he was too lazy to take care of himself. Despite everything the boy had already done so far, Tony was still amazed to find out he had finished all of them by the time he was supposed to go home.

"Hey Peter?", Tony said, placing a hand on the kid's shoulder. "I'm really proud of you, you did a great job!"

Then something completely unexpected happened. While Tony was not the best with emotions, he was pretty sure compliments and affirmation were the right way to go. However, instead of blushing and smiling like he usually did, the kid flinched back, his eyes filling with tears.

"Mr. Stark..."

"Peter? Are you okay?"

"I'm so sorry," the child sobbed, making Tony panic. He had no idea what to do, he didn't even know how on earth he had messed up.

"Fri, get me Steve," he ordered, before pushing the kid towards a chair. "Here, sit down. Why don't you tell me what happened?"

The kid looked up at him like his whole world was falling apart. "I- I betrayed your trust, I'm so sorry."

Tony still didn't understand, all he knew was that there were thick tears running down Peter's cheeks and somehow he had caused them. "Peter, if you broke a tool or something, I can just replace it, it's no big-"

"No!", the kid cut him off. "I did it on purpose! I stole from you, Mr. Stark!"

Tony's thoughts came to a screeching halt. His mind filled with images of a desert cave and a bomb with his name on it. Huge piles of his weapons. And a man he had trusted reaching into his chest to pull his heart out. The last person who had betrayed Tony.

The engineer looked around the room, his palms beginning to sweat. He hadn't even bothered to check what was still in the workshop before letting a complete stranger in. How could Tony have been so naive? Was the access to the servers even restricted?

The hero's breathing sped up as he imagined what could happen if any of his latest inventions ended up in the wrong hands. He spun back around to the still silently crying kid.

"Goddammit!", he yelled, not knowing if he should feel sorry when Peter flinched back, his guilt and sadness replaced by fear.

Tony took a few deep breaths, trying to control himself. "Alright. Alright, we can fix this. You just give back what you took, right now!"

"I- I don't have all of it anymore, but I could-"

"Fuck!", Tony swore as the kid slipped out of his chair and away from him. "Who did you sell to?"

"I- I didn't sell anything!", the trembling boy defended himself. "I ate it myself!"

That stopped Tony's train of thought once more. His anger was washed away by confusion as he wondered how the kid had managed to eat blueprints or metal parts.

At that very moment, Steve jogged in, his worried eyes falling on the distressed kid. "Peter!", he called out and came closer, causing the boy to whimper and stumble away from him.

"Tony, what happened? Is he hurt?", the Captain asked, his eyes not leaving Peter.

"I- to be honest, I'm not sure," Tony answered.

"I think I can be of assistance, boss," Friday interrupted. "Three days ago, Mr. Parker took 5 protein bars and a package of cookies from the workshop cabinet. I believe that is the act of theft he was referring to."

"Theft?", Steve repeated, his eyes hardening. "Tony, please tell me my billionaire husband is not attacking a child for taking food. Otherwise I have to divorce you, take half your money and use it to lead the revolution against you."

"No, I was not going to go full Javert on the kid," Tony defended himself with an eye roll. "I thought he meant tech when he told me he stole from me."

They both looked back at Peter, who looked absolutely terrified, his eyes fixed on Steve.

"Kid? Can you hear me?", Steve tried, but the boy seemed to be even more upset after being addressed. The pained little whimper he let out caused Tony spring into action.

"Steve, stay back."

"Why?"

"Because he is scared and you are a six feet tall, muscular, medically enhanced man." Once Steve had stepped back, Tony concentrated on Peter again. "Hey kid, no one is mad at you, okay? Nothing bad is going to happen."

"Really? You promise?", the boy whispered, sounding far too young.

"I promise. Here, sit down, Steve will fetch you a glass of water," he said, pulling up a chair.

When Peter had settled down and finished the water they had offered him, Tony let out a relieved breath. He still didn't know what he was doing, but at least the situation was improving.

"I- I'm really sorry," Peter said, again looking sad instead of afraid, which Tony saw as an absolute win.

"It's okay, son," Steve reassured him while Tony nodded along.

"I know it was wrong, I was just so hungry. I couldn't concentrate and I wanted to make Mr. Stark proud..."

"You did," Tony was quick to tell him. "You've impressed me a lot these past few days."

There was a small smile dancing over the kid's face at that, which Tony mirrored.

"Look, Peter," Steve said slowly, "We are glad the bit of food could help you, but why were you so hungry in the first place?"

The teen looked down, his shoulders coming up and his smile gone. "I- I just didn't eat that morning and I- uh- I forgot to pack lunch..."

"You know there is a huge food court just a few levels down, right?", Tony asked confused. "I'm pretty sure they showed you during the tour on the first day."

Neither he nor Steve could understand the mumbled reply.

"What was that?", Tony checked.

Suddenly the kid's head snapped up, his expression angry and defensive, despite the tears still shimmering in his eyes. "I can't afford that, okay?! I have no fucking money! I'm sorry I let you down, but I would rather have a jacket for winter than a twenty dollar burger!"

Tony was taken aback by the outburst. "But that school you go to..."

"I've got a scholarship," the kid said like it was a dirty secret. "I could never afford it on my own. I'm sorry."

"Oh kid...", Tony sighed when he started to understand the situation. "You don't have to apologize. I'm the one who let you down. I should have checked in more. From now on, you can have as much food as you want. Just show them your badge next time and they'll know not to charge you."

"N-Next time?", the kid asked, his eyes widening. "I can still come back?"

"Of course," Steve answered even before Tony could. "Tony is right, it's not your fault. I should have been more attentive too. I'm sorry, Pete."

"Thank you," Peter said, a shiver running through him. "Thank you so much, I don't deserve this."

"You do," Tony said firmly, frowning down at the skinny kid, when he realized something. 'It's warm here,' had been Peter's explanation for falling asleep. Of course, scrawny as he was, he was probably cold right now.

"Steve, undress."

"Tony, what the hell?!"

“Your hoodie, darling. The kid is freezing.”

“Oh right,” Steve replied and handed the hoodie to the scandalized looking boy.

“N-No sir, I can’t take this! I even have my own, so-”

“You’re upset,” Steve said calmly. “Over-sized clothing is a must when someone is upset.”

“Believe me kid, nothing feels safer than Captain America’s hoodie,” Tony said, winking at the kid and lovingly smiling at his husband.

“I- I- This is so much, I don’t understand,” Peter stuttered. “Why are you being nice to me? I did something wrong.”

“First of all, you didn’t,” Steve said firmly. “And even if you did, Peter, you are just 15 years old. Don’t you think children deserve a certain amount of kindness? Just because?”

“Just because?”

“Just because,” Tony agreed, his heart breaking at the kid’s confused tone.

“Okay... Maybe,” Peter said, “But I’m not a kid! I’m 15, I’m supposed to make myself useful, not beg you guys for food. Isn’t that why I’m here? To be useful?”

“No Peter,” Tony sighed. “You are here because this is where you belong. You are such a bright kid. You deserve a chance to shine.”

“Okay,” the boy finally agreed, though he still didn’t seem to believe them. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“If Friday knew all along, why didn’t she rat me out?”

“That,” Tony said, looking up at the closest camera, “Is an excellent question.”

“The order was to tell you if Mr. Parker does something stupid,” Friday explained. “I found his attempt to hide from my cameras rather intelligent. Had he not missed one, he would have succeeded.

“Just one?”, Steve wondered. “That’s impressive! Even Nat sometimes misses one!”

“Good job kiddo!”, Tony agreed, desperate to create a more lighthearted mood.

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After the kid went home, Steve and Tony went up to the penthouse and sank down on the sofa.

“Wow,” Tony groaned, “That was depressing.”

“Can’t believe he thought you were gonna kick him out for taking a bit of food,” Steve agreed.

“Can’t believe you have a plan for divorcing me,” Tony shot back.

“You know how there is a Hulk containment plan?”, Steve asked, shifting over so he could lean against his husband. “There is one for you too, in case you go super villain on us.”

“Damn,” Tony chuckled. “I’m not sure if I should be honored or offended.”

“Well, it’s not a very serious plan,” Steve admitted. “Part of it is for me to get naked to remind you why patriotism is worth it.”

“That would probably work,” Tony nodded.

“So...”, Steve said, grinning at his husband. “Captain America’s hoodie is the safest feeling there is, huh?”

“No,” the engineer disagreed. “There is something better, but considering how much he was flinching away, I don’t think Peter is ready to upgrade to patriotic hugs.”

“Yet,” Steve added, determination slipping into his voice.

“Yet,” his husband agreed, pressing his cheek into the Captain’s chest.

“Tony, something is wrong with the boy,” Steve said after a while.

“Yeah...”, Tony sighed. “That panic attack, the insecurity... He seems so... hopeless.”

“Do you think something is wrong at home or school?”

“I don’t know... His aunt didn’t pick up or call back, which is strange, but her emails sounded normal. Of course I looked at his school record before offering him the internship, but everything seems fine. No fights, good grades...”

“Aunt? He doesn’t live with his parents? Maybe that is causing his struggle?”

“Maybe... the record says he was five when they died, that’s old enough to remember and miss them. Have you noticed how he was talking about his situation? ‘I can’t afford that’. Not ‘we’.”

“He seems to think he’s all alone in the world,” Steve sighed sadly.

“He’s not.”

“We’ll just keep an eye on him,” Steve decided.

“Friday will too,” Tony added. “Fri, from now on you can’t keep things about Peter from me.”

“It was not my plan anyways,” the AI answered. “Now I have seen enough interaction between you and him to know Peter will be fine.”

“You seem protective of him,” Steve chuckled. He understood where the AI was coming from.

“Hurt that sweet child and I will take over the planet and destroy you all,” Friday threatened.

“Can she actually do that?”, Steve whispered to Tony.

“I don’t know,” his husband shrugged. “Guess we’ll just have to make sure we don’t give her a reason to.”

Chapter 6

Campfire, freshly fallen rain and clean sheets. Peter buried his face in the soft fabric, sighing softly. Mr. Stark had been right, the hoodie felt safe. It was Saturday, and his first day as an official intern would be on Tuesday. The idea of not going back to the tower in the morning hurt. Peter could still feel the strong grip of Mr. Stark's hand on his shoulder and the larger, softer palm of Cap ta in Rogers on his back.

It wasn't like he never got touched, Ned hugged him all the time and even MJ sometimes slung an arm around him, but this was different. Peter had come to associate the touch of an adult with pain, but the two men reminded him of living with May.

May... Peter sill hadn't been to her grave. It was so unfair, wasn't losing his entire family supposed to be his biggest problem? Why was there so much at once? So much pain, fear and sadness. He just wanted to catch a break.

The teen pulled his wrist closer to his chest. He had hurt it when wrestling a robber during patrol, but at least it wasn't broken. His healing factor was getting weaker. Peter was getting worried he might lose his powers if he kept living like this. Pathetic. It wasn't even fall yet, let alone winter.

Peter breathed in through the fabric covering his nose, imagining what it would be like if Mr. Rogers was there with him now. His arms would keep him safe and warm. Peter fell asleep with a smile on his face.

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Ned was confused. The first day, Peter had been just as excited about the program at SI as anyone would have expected him to be, but after the second day he didn't come over to Ned's for the rest of the week and would only send back short replies when he texted him.

Peter had not been the same since May died. Of course he hadn't been, who would blame him for that, but at least in the beginning, Ned had known what was going on with him. After about two months living with his foster parents, his best friend had stopped offering details about their many fights or how much he missed his aunt. Now he was just insisting he was fine while clearly falling apart.

It was not just mentally, Peter had lost weight and wasn't sleeping enough. Ned got him a sandwich every day and made sure to invite him over for dinner as often as possible, but he was still getting skinnier. He started to suspect that maybe it had to do with Peter's spider powers, but he wouldn't tell Ned. Spiderman was the only thing his best friend would still talk about freely, and even those stories were getting duller.

"Peter!", Ned cheered when he saw the boy Monday morning. "You're back!"

"Of course he is back," Flash sneered as he popped up behind Peter. "It's not like Parker is anything special. He never deserved his spot there in the first place!"

With amazement, Ned watched the first real emotion appear he had seen on P eter's face for weeks. "Why can you never just shut the hell up?!", he hissed, spinning around to look at Flash. "Maybe you are right. Maybe I don't belong there. Maybe I am not the smartest student here. Maybe I just got lucky. But why the fuck is that my fault?! You are the one who didn't want to put the work in because the project wouldn't be graded! I didn't do anything to you, so leave me

alone!”

Everyone in the hallway just stared at the pair, until the school bell made them hurry to get to class. Ned wasn't sure if he should be relieved Peter finally snapped or not. Flash would probably beat him up later, but at least there was a fire back in him.

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The next three weeks had Steve and Tony amazed and concerned all the same. It became clear how remarkable Peter Parker was and after a little bit of teaching he became a real help in the workshop and occasionally the other labs when Tony decided to let him go for a few hours.

It also became clear how troubled the teen was. While he could ramble on for hours about a school project or his ideas to improve an invention, personal information he rarely gave away. No mention of his aunt or life at home. The only people he always talked about were his friends from school.

One Thursday, Tony had to attend a phone conference he almost canceled when Peter's face fell at being told he wouldn't have time for him that afternoon.

“Don't worry, I've got a special treat for you,” he told the boy with a wink. “Follow me.”

Tony led them to the biology lab, a grin spreading over his face when he spotted a purple sweater and messy curls.

“Bruce Bear! How is my favorite mad scientist?”

“Tony, you are your own favorite scientist, you egomaniac bastard!”, Bruce shot back, his smile betraying his real feelings.

“You- You- You are...”, Peter stuttered, suddenly not so disappointed not to hang out in Tony's workshop.

“Yeah,” Bruce sighed with a fake grin, “I am the H-”

“Doctor Bruce Banner!”, Peter gasped, making the Avenger raise his eyebrows in surprise. “I've just read your paper on using RNA vaccines in cancer treatment and possibly other diseases! It was truly remarkable!”

“You read that paper?”, Bruce wondered, a real smile now spreading over his face.

“Of course I did, you are MY favorite scientist!”, the kid proclaimed, making Tony almost feel a bit jealous. Almost.

“That's college level research!”, Bruce pointed out, pride and confusion mixed in his voice.

Peter shrugged, making Tony chuckle. “Told you he was a little genius!”

“That's impressive, Peter,” Bruce praised, making the kid's eyes go wide.

“You know my name?!”

“Of course,” the Avenger smiled. “Tony and Steve talk about you all the time.”

Peter's face turned red and he wouldn't look at Tony anymore, so the man decided to spare him some embarrassment. “Alright then. Peter, today you are gonna assist Dr. Banner. You need to listen to everything he tells you, okay?”

“Of course Mr. Stark!”, Peter said, looking excitedly between them.

“Go clean your hands and get a lab coat Peter, then I’ll give you a tour of my lab,” Bruce said with a warm smile.

“Yes sir!”, Peter answered and hurried off.

“Are you sure you don’t want to send someone else up here?”, Bruce worried. “I can’t explain things to him the whole time, I’ve got some very important experiments lined up.”

“Believe me, the kid will be fine,” Tony said proudly, before his face fell.

“Tones, stop looking so grumpy.”

“You are supposed to babysit him, not steal him!”, Tony complained. “Why are you his favorite??? I’m Iron Man!”

“Don’t worry, I’ll give your kid back later!”

“He- He is not MY kid,” Tony tried to defend himself, but Bruce just gave him a knowing look. “Go get some work done, or Pepper will kill you.”

With one last angry huff, Tony stormed to his office.

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“Mr. Stark, I believe the latest numbers clearly show-”

“This call is over, Mr. Stark has to attend important Avengers business,” a robotic voice interrupted suddenly and the people on his screen disappeared.

Alarmed Tony jumped up. “Friday! What the hell?! Is there a mission?”

“No, sir. My apologies for deceiving your business partners, but you are needed in the biology lab.”

“Peter?”

“Mr. Parker is currently injured, losing blood and not receiving help.”

“Fuck!”

Even though Friday reassured him it was not a big wound, Tony was sprinting to the elevator. The ride down took two whole minutes, enough time for Tony to completely lose his mind.

“Bruce!”, he yelled when the doors finally opened and he spotted his friend bending over his lab journal. “What the hell happened to my kid?”

“What?”, Bruce asked alarmed. “Peter is right there?” The confused man pointed to a table on the other end of the room, where Peter was preparing a sample to put it under a microscope.

Slowly Tony walked closer, trying to spot the injury Friday had been referring to, but the kid seemed fine. “Peter?”

“Mr. Stark!”, the boy smiled and gave him a wave. “Is your meeting already over?”

"It- I ended it," Tony said, his heart still racing. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, of course. Dr. Banner has been really kind to me."

Tony was about to let out a relieved breath when he noticed a long tear in the boy's hoodie on his left arm. "Peter? What happened?"

"Nothing! It's fine I-"

"Show me your arm," Tony ordered sternly. The boy let his head hang and rolled up his sleeve.

"Oh god...", Bruce, who had followed Tony to find out what was wrong, whispered horrified. "What happened?"

There was a ten centimeter long and probably half a centimeter deep cut across the kid's arm. Now that the injury was bared, a bit of blood was dripping on the floor.

"Oh I just slipped with the razor blade when cutting the sample into size-", suddenly Peter's head snapped up and his eyes settled on Bruce. "But I cleaned and disinfected the blade super carefully, Dr. Banner! I promise the sample is not contaminated!"

"Is- Is that duct tape?!", Tony asked, ignoring the boy's senseless explanation. The kid had actually glued his wound shut with several pieces of duct tape, which were pressing his skin together.

"Uh... Yes? It was bleeding too much." Peter looked down at the floor, where a small pool of blood was forming. "Oh shoot! I'm sorry, I should have used more tape, I'll clean this up right away, sir!"

"NO!", Tony stopped him, feeling horrified and angry. "Come with me."

"No way!", Peter said, shaking his head. "I don't want to go home yet."

"I'm not sending you home-"

"Why are you angry anyways? I did what you asked me to do! I did it right!", the kid said, sounding upset now.

"Excuse me?", Tony hissed, staring between the boy and his arm, which was now completely covered in blood. A piece of duct tape had come loose and was now revealing the pink flesh underneath.

"You told me to listen to Dr. Banner!"

"I'm pretty damn sure Bruce didn't tell you to- to- to do that!", Tony yelled back gesturing to Peter's injury and the blood everywhere.

"He told me to prepare the samples! I did it all right, I promise!", he turned to Bruce, who almost looked a bit green now. "You can check them, Dr. Banner!"

"Why didn't you tell me you were injured, Peter?", Bruce asked carefully.

"You said you had to work and to stay at my table. I did! The duct table was already here."

Both men looked at each other and then at the kid, who still didn't seem to get it.

“Why are you mad at me?”, Peter asked, his bottom lip trembling. “I was just trying to make you proud,” he added, his huge, sad eyes meeting Tony’s.

“Oh kid...”, Tony sighed. “I’m not angry, I’m just worried. Let’s go to the med bay.”

The elevator ride was awkward. Bruce tried to apologize to Tony for not noticing, but the engineer brushed him off. Peter was excellent at hiding things.

“Sit down,” Bruce told the boy and got out the disinfectant and bandages. “I don’t think it needs stitches, but I need to clean it.

Peter held out his arm, but his whole body began to tremble when Bruce came closer, so the man took a step back.

“Pete? Do you not want Bruce to touch you?”, Tony guessed.

“I’m fine. Just tell me what to do, sir.”

“Peter, no,” Tony said sadly.

The kid shrugged and looked down at his arm. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Tony told him, “But we have to take care of that arm. Steve has some medical training, do you want me to get him?”

Peter nodded and Tony told Friday to deliver the message, who quickly informed them Steve would arrive in about four minutes, which seemed to upset the kid.

“Mr. Stark? Why were you so upset?”

Tony swallowed down a frustrated scream. “Peter, you are still bleeding and you just put fucking duct tape on it-”

“The duct tape?”, Peter asked hopefully. “Is that the problem? Can we please take it off before Steve comes? I don’t want him to be angry too...”

“No one is mad at you,” Tony reassured him, taking his right hand in his. “I was just worried. I’m sorry for yelling.”

The kid gave him a shocked look. “I- Why would you apologize? I’m an intern, you can-”

“I can control myself. I have no right to act like an asshole,” Tony cut him off. He wanted to say more, but he realized they were running out of time, so he peeled the tape off Peter’s arm as gently as possible, wincing every time it pulled on the boy’s skin.

“Peter!”, his husband’s voice came from behind him just when he had finished.

Steve rushed to Peter’s side and took a quick look at his arm. “Oh no, you poor kid. Don’t worry, we’ll have that cleaned and wrapped in no time!”, he promised and brushed the boy’s hair back gently. With a stab of guilt Tony watched the kid relax. This was exactly what he had needed, not being yelled at.

To everyone’s shock, Peter didn’t even flinch when Steve started cleaning and bandaging his wound. Instead a blank look took over his face, which would probably haunt Tony in his nightmares for a while.

“Thanks Mr. Rogers,” Peter said with a smile when it was all done and Tony watched his husband pull the kid into a hug with a mixture of pride and jealousy.

“Of course son, I’ve got you.”

“Wait here,” Tony told his boys and went over to his lab.

“There you go, you need something clean to wear,” he told the kid and handed him the hoodie he had gotten for him.

“That- No, I can’t take this! I still have Mr. Rogers and-”

“I want you to have it, Peter,” Tony cut him off. “Come on, give me that,” he gestured to the blood stained one the boy was still wearing. “I’ll get it washed and fixed for you.”

Tony’s heart broke at how small Peter looked in his hoodie as he wrapped his arms around himself with a soft smile. “Thank you, Mr. Stark. Iron Man’s hoodie feels pretty safe too.”

Suddenly the kid busted into tears, his arms tensing up so much, Tony was worried his cut would bleed through the bandage.

“Peter, it’s okay now. We are here. Nothing bad can happen to you,” the billionaire whispered as he sank down in front of the kid to pull him into his arms.

“M-Mr. Stark, I don’t understand,” Peter sobbed into his shoulder. “Why are you so nice to me? I messed up and Dr. Banner didn’t even yell at me!”

“You did nothing wrong,” Tony told him while Steve wrapped his arms around both of them. After a while the boy’s cries died down, but that was probably due to exhaustion, not comfort.

“Kid...”, Tony sighed, then shook his head to get clarity. “Okay, I’m gonna call your aunt now, she-”

“No!” Peter cut him off. “She won’t pick up. May is- Uh- May is on a business trip! She won’t be home for another week!”

Tony frowned at that. He looked at Steve, who was mirroring his expression. Since when did nurses take business trips?

“And she just left you alone at home?”

“It’s not like I’m a baby! I can take care of myself!”, the boy pouted.

“We can’t just leave you alone like this...”, Steve sighed.

“Ned!”, Peter yelled. “I can go to Ned’s!”

“Your best friend? You want to stay there tonight?”, Steve checked.

Peter nodded and Tony pulled out his phone while walking out the room. “Friday, find the number of Ned Leeds and call him.”

“Hello? Who is this?”, a boy’s voice asked after a few seconds.

“This is Tony Stark.”

“Yeah, right.”

Tony switched to video call and smirked when the expression of the boy who appeared on his screen turned from bored to shocked.

“Holy shit! Tony Stark!”

“Ned Leeds, I presume?”

“Yes sir!”

“I’m calling about Peter, he got hurt and-”

“Wait! Peter?”, the kid asked confused. “You know Peter? Is he okay?”

“Just a small injury,” Tony said, wondering why his best friend didn’t know about Peter’s internship. “Can he come over to yours tonight? His aunt is out of town.”

“His...? Oh! Yes of course! My mum says Peter is always welcome.”

“Good, I’m gonna text you when I’m in front of your house,” he said and hung up so he could get back to Peter.

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Ned stared at his phone in utter confusion. On the one hand, he was amazed by Tony fucking Stark calling him and knowing his full name! On the other hand, he was going crazy with worry. Since when did Peter know Tony Stark? Why was he with him right now? What happened to him? How badly was he hurt?

Deciding that sitting around wondering about what the hell was going on wasn’t going to do anything, Ned texted his parents about Peter coming over and then started preparing a mattress for his friend. Peter was over so often that he had his own toothbrush and some cloth at Ned’s house, so there wasn’t a lot to take care of.

After about half an hour he got a message from the number he had saved as Tony Stark (Holy cow, he had Tony Stark’s number!) that they were there.

Ned ran downstairs, opened the door and was faced with not only Iron Man, but also Captain America. The teen would have completely lost his mind, if there hadn’t been his best friend standing between them, pale and shaking.

“Peter! What happened to you?”

“Nothing,” the other boy mumbled. “They are just being dramatic.”

“Come in, I’m getting you a hot chocolate,” Ned told him, ushering him inside. “Uh... Mr. Iron Man? Captain America? Would you like to come in too, or...?”

“No thanks, we better head back to the tower. Call if you need help, you have my number,” Tony Stark told him, a wide press smile plastered on his face. Then his expression turned softer as he looked at Peter. “Rest a bit, kiddo. I’ll text you later, okay?”

“Okay, Mr. Stark.”

“Sleep well, Peter,” Captain America added and the two men turned around to drive off in an

incredibly expensive looking car.

After Ned was done freaking out, Peter told him all about his new internship and his... friendship? with the superheroes.

“Peter, why didn’t you tell me? This is the coolest thing ever, and I’m your best friend!”

“This is why!”, Peter accused, jumping out of his chair and pointing at Ned’s face. “You- You expect me to be happy and excited, and I am! I really am, but I don’t want to hear about how jealous you are, or how perfect my life is, because it still fucking sucks, okay?! I hate it! I have no family, no future, and I’m scared!”, his voice broke at the last sentence and he sunk back into his chair. “I’m so fucking scared, Ned.”

“Of what?”, Ned pleaded. “You stopped telling me things and I don’t know what to do. I’m here for you, whatever you need. I love you, Pete.”

“I love you too,” Peter mumbled. “I- I need more time. To figure some things out. I will tell you, just not now, okay?”

“Okay,” Ned sighed. “Just stay tonight, I’ll order pizza and when mum and dad come home we can tell them we had to work on a school project. I’ve got you, Peter.”

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“So... Something is definitely wrong,” Steve said when Tony started the car.

“Yeah, no shit. He just taped it shut, Steve. With fucking duct tape.”

“What?!”

“Yeah,” Tony repeated, still not believing it himself. “Was not gonna stop working no matter what and was confused why I was upset. He thought he did the right thing by being useful and enduring the pain.”

“God...”

Tony looked over and saw the way his husband’s hands were shaking with rage. He was feeling the exact same.

“We both know what this looks like,” Tony said, trying to keep his voice calm. “Issues with food, believes his feelings and needs don’t matter, doesn’t understand basic human decency and kindness, often shows up with dirty hair and clothes and his guardian won’t even pick up the phone! She just left him alone and won’t even pick up the fucking phone!” Tony realized he was yelling, so he took a deep breath to calm down. “I wish it was just neglect, but-”

“The flinching, the constant apologies...”, Steve added. “He also seems far too comfortable with pain.”

“Peter is being physically abused and neglected,” Tony concluded, a fire starting to burn in his chest. “I’m getting him out, Steve. If this is too much, if this is where your acceptance of my craziness stops, you need to tell me, but I-”

“Tony!”, Steve’s harsh voice cut him off. “I’m in. Of course I’m fucking in, we need to protect our boy. Just tell me the plan.”

“We can’t just go to his aunt and confront her,” Tony explained. “If we don’t have a bulletproof plan to get him away from her, he will suffer the consequences. Believe me,” he added, thinking back to the few times servants or teachers had tried to question Howard.

“Then what else can we do?”, Steve begged, his tone getting desperate.

“We need information and evidence,” Tony decided. “A statement from the kid. And maybe from that other boy and his parents. If I pull some strings, I should be able to get the kid out of there in no time.”

“His aunt is not home for a while,” Steve pointed out.

“Yeah,” Tony agreed. “This is our chance. We’ll invite Peter over for the weekend. Make sure he feels safe and then ask him about it. That kid will not suffer any longer, not if we can help it.”

Chapter 7

“Peter? Hey Pete, can you hear me?”

Slowly he lifted his head up, looking over at his best friend. “Ned... I think Tony Stark just ask me to have a sleepover?”

“What?! Let me see that!”, Ned held his hand out and Peter gave him the phone.

“Hello Peter, I’ve got a new project that will require your assistance. I think it would be easiest for you to come over tomorrow and stay with us until Sunday. Please tell your aunt Steve and I will make sure you get enough time to do your homework. - Tony Stark,” Ned read out loud, his eyes almost popping out of his head. “Holy shit!”

“I know!”, Peter yelled back, completely losing his mind.

“What kind of project do you think it is?”, Ned asked, his leg beginning to bounce with excitement.

“I don’t know, maybe the new widow bites? He said-”

“Hold up!”, Ned shouted. “You work with Avenger tech???”

Peter spend about an hour explaining everything he had experienced in the SI labs for the past few weeks. The whole story of how he thought he was gonna get kicked out, how Mr. Rogers had calmed him down in that bathroom, how Mr. Stark had told him he would personally mentor him and everything that happened afterwards. The stealing indecent, the time Mr. Rogers had brought freshly baked cookies for them, all the tech he had worked on and finally meeting Bruce Banner.

After Peter was done, he felt a wave of relief wash over him. There was still so, so much Ned didn’t know, but at least now he could tell him about the good things. It was only now that he had shared really sinking in how lucky he had gotten.

“Wow...”, Ned said after it had been quiet for a while. “I can’t even imagine what it’s like inside Stark Tower!”

“Uh...”

“Peter, what did you do?”

“I might have taken some pictures?”

“Is that even legal?!”, Ned gasped and Peter winced.

“Probably not? There are no projects or other sensitive information in them though!”

Shyly he showed Ned, who stared at the screen in confusion. “Why is Tony Stark wearing a party head?”

“It was his robot’s birthday.”

“Right... And is that Captain America cuddling a pillow?”

“He fell asleep in the workshop.”

“Peter?”

“Yes Ned?”

“This isn’t normal.”

Peter let his hand with the phone sink, looking down at the picture he had secretly taken of the two super heroes arguing over the best kind of Pizza. Mr. Stark had his arms crossed and was standing up on his tiptoes, Mr. Rogers was smirking down at him and ruffling the billionaire’s hair.

“What do you mean?”

“Peter,” Ned sighed. “Super heroes don’t bake cookies for teenagers. And billionaire genius inventors don’t drive their intern to his best friend’s house. You should have gotten a driver or a cap at best, maybe not even bus money.”

“Oh...”, Peter whispered, not sure how to feel. Was Ned mad at him?

“Dude, I’ve seen the way they looked at you. I think... I think they care. They really care about you.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I know this isn’t suddenly fixing all your problems,” Ned reassured him. “I know you are still uncomfortable with Mr. and Mrs. Michel even though you won’t talk about it. I know you miss May. I know school and being Spiderman is stressing you out. I know Flash is bothering you more than you let on. But Peter... This makes you happy. They are good for you. Just take all the happiness you can get, okay?”

.....

The next day, there was a black car with tinted windows waiting outside the school.

“Peter, I think that creepy dude is staring at you,” MJ pointed out.

He looked over at the man and frowned. Where had he seen...

“Oh!”, Peter gasped surprised. “That’s Mr. Hogan, I gotta go!”

He jogged over to the car where the man in a suit and black sunglasses was waiting for him.

“Mr. Hogan! What are you doing here?”

“Tony sent me to pick you up, so don’t waste my time and get in.”

Peter swallowed nervously and got in the passenger seat.

“And call me Happy,” the man added while starting the car.

“Sir? Why did you come to pick me up? Aren’t you the head of security?”

“I am supposed to be,” Happy grumbled. “I was his driver before. Guess he decided you are a priority.”

“Oh...”, Peter said slowly. “He does that a lot, right? Promoting people? Clair was an intern and

now she's a lab head and I was just a temporary visitor and now I am..."

"A priority," Happy finished for him.

.....

"Someone is in a good mood," Tony commented when Steve walked down the stairs, humming happily.

"Peter is coming over," Steve shrugged.

"He was here yesterday too," Tony pointed out.

"I know, it's just... He seems happy, here, with us, right? When he leaves, the kid is well-fed and happy, but when he comes back he's a bit skinnier and sadder every time. I don't want to give him back anymore. And tonight he's gonna stay with us."

"This is what I love so much about you," Tony sighed and walked right into his husband's arms. "You always see the positive things. Here I am, already panicking about what we might find out this weekend, and you are just happy you get to feed and cuddle him for a few days."

Steve wrapped his arms around the shorter man and pressed a kiss to his head. "Can't wait for tonight. You always get to hang out with him during work, but today I get to make him a home-cooked meal. Oh! And lunch. The kid is getting lunch."

Tony looked up at his husband's face, who was grinning like an idiot and knew he was the luckiest man in the world. "Steve Rogers-Stark, I am so, so fucking glad I married you. I feel sorry for everyone who never gets to know you like this. Who believes you are a perfect little soldier or a symbol of masculinity and patriotism. Fuck all that, you are simply a really good man. And just so you know, it's a total turn on, so please let go of me now before I do unspeakable things to you."

Steve's arms around him tightened as he leaned in to whisper in Tony's ear. "That's just a reason to never take my hands off of you ever again."

"Darling, I-"

"Boss, Mr. Hogan and Mr. Parker have arrived in the lobby," Friday cut him off.

"Gotta go!", Tony smirked as he jumped away from his husband, who was smiling excitedly once more.

The billionaire made his way to the ground floor in the private elevator leading to the penthouse and the Avenger's personal rooms and training spaces. When he stepped outside, nobody seemed to notice him, so he just gave Happy a hand signal to bring the boy over.

"Hello Peter. Are you feeling better today?", he checked, mustering the kid over the rim of his sunglasses.

"Yes sir," Peter mumbled, his cheeks turning a little pink. "Sorry about yesterday, I-"

"None of that, Peter. Let's go up to the penthouse."

The boy's eyes widened. "Wait, your penthouse? Why?"

"To drop your stuff off in your room? Also, we are having lunch with Steve."

“My- My what?”, Peter wondered. “I thought I was gonna sleep on the couch in the workshop or something?”

Tony frowned at that. “No, you are staying with us.”

“In a room? With a bed?”, Peter checked, sounding amazed.

“Yes. Now come with me, we can’t let Captain America wait,” Tony said, suppressing the urge to shake the kid. Was he really surprised by being offered a room?

The ride up to the penthouse was quiet. Tony would have offered to take the huge backpack from the boy, had he not known how protective he was of it.

When the doors slid open to reveal the open living space with the couches and huge windows, Peter let out a low whistle. “Wow Mr. Stark, it’s not like I imagined it!”

“Yeah? What did you picture?”

“I don’t know... not something so... warm.”

“Peter!”, Steve greeted and poked his head out of the kitchen. “It’s good to see you! I’ll be with you in a minute, I’m just finishing lunch.”

“Hello Mr. Rogers,” the kid answered politely. “Thank you for having me. You have a beautiful home.”

“Wow, somebody taught you manners!”, Tony chuckled and ruffled the boy’s already messy hair. For a change, it was actually clean.

“Yeah, May would kill me for being a rude guest,” the kid said sadly, ramming a knife through Tony’s chest. He could imagine all too well what methods that woman had used to make Peter this obedient and polite.

“Right... Come on, I’ll show you around.”

Tony gave Peter a quick tour and then showed him to ~~his~~ the guest room. The kid was delighted by the size and tasteful furniture. After a lot of reassurance that Steve and Tony really wanted the teen with them and there was no way they’d have him sleep in the workshop, they went back downstairs where Steve was waiting with three plates with sandwiches and cut fruit.

During lunch, Steve took over the conversation and tried to ask Peter about school. At first Tony had gotten worried when the kid seemed uncomfortable, but soon he realized the boy was just shy and blushed every time he mentioned his friend MJ.

“Uff... I’m so full,” the six feet tall man with the super fast metabolism said, pushing his plate away. “Pete, do you want to have this?”

The kid’s eyes lit up when they fell on the sandwich Steve hadn’t eaten. “Really?”

Steve slid the plate over to Peter, who happily dug in. Tony noticed his husband’s soft smile and once more he was jealous of the man’s ability to simply enjoy the moment, while Tony was already freaking out about how hungry their boy must have been to eat this much at once.

“Time for dessert!”, Tony said as he clapped his hands.

“No, wait, I wanted to save what’s left of the pie for dinner,” Steve frowned, making Tony roll his

eyes at him.

“Don’t worry your pretty little head about it.”

“Wait, what do you mean?”, Steve asked, his hand wrapping around his husband’s wrist to stop him from leaving. Tony smirked. Of course the blond would fuss about his perfect plan to give Peter a proper family dinner.

“I don’t want any!” Both men turned around to the boy, who’s eyes were darting between them now.

“Peter?”, Steve questioned, sounding just as confused as Tony felt.

“I don’t want any!”, the teen repeated. “If- If I don’t take any, it’s enough for you two for lunch and dinner, right?”

Tony wanted to ask him what was wrong, Peter never turned down food, but then he saw the kid looking at the space between them. Tony looked down and noticed the way Steve’s hand was curled around his wrist.

He suddenly felt ill when he remembered Howard’s hand gripping his mother just like this. It hadn’t happened often, his parents hadn’t spent enough time together to fight a lot, but when it had happened, it had started like this.

It took everything in Tony not to pull away, that would scare Peter even more. Steve was not Howard, he reminded himself. His hand was just resting there, not squeezing or pulling.

“It’s okay,” Tony said softly, stepping away from Steve, his chest getting a bit lighter when his husband’s hand simply slid off, instead of yanking him back. “I bought ice cream for us earlier.”

The billionaire went to the kitchen and used the time it took to fill three bowls to calm his racing heart. When he came back to the table, Steve gave him a knowing look and continued leading the conversation, allowing him a moment to collect his thoughts.

“Hey Peter?”, Steve said after they had all finished. “Why don’t you go down to the workshop and I’ll send down Tones in a minute?”

“Okay, Mr. Rogers,” the kid nodded and went to the elevator.

“Tony?”, Steve asked gently once Peter was gone. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” the engineer said, letting his head sink against his husband’s shoulder.

“What spooked you?”

“The kid... Not sure why, but he knows.”

“Knows what?”, Steve asked, his arm settling around Tony’s shoulders.

“What can happen when a husband gets angry. What you could do to me.”

Steve tensed up. “Did I do something wrong?”

Tony shook his head before burying his nose in the Captain’s shoulder. “No. It just looked like... Your hand on my wrist... Looked like...”

“Howard?”, Steve guessed.

“Yeah,” Tony sighed.

Steve still seemed worried. “But... I do that all the time. Do you want me to stop?”

Again Tony shook his head. “I like our casual touches. I know you weren’t trying to hurt or control me, just get my attention. I didn’t even think of it that way. Just realized the similarity when the kid was staring.”

“Okay,” Steve said, finally relaxing. “I love you.”

“Love you too, Cap.”

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Peter began to realize that maybe Ned had been right. This was his chance to be happy, just for a bit, before he had to fight for his life again. He had gotten a big lunch, and Mr. Roger’s had already promised dinner and breakfast. Both Mr. Stark and the Captain had been nice to him and spending two whole days with them would be so much fun!

The engineer soon joined him in the workshop and they started making plans for new exploding arrows for Hawkeye. Peter wasn’t completely sure why the project required him being there, let alone staying overnight, but he was not going to turn down an opportunity like this.

At some point Mr. Rogers joined them to sit on the couch and do some paperwork. When he got up again, Peter asked him to stay, which earned him a bright smile. However, The Captain told him he had to go back to the penthouse to start preparing dinner. Apparently he was making fresh lasagna for the ‘special occasion’. Peter tried to ask what that was, but the adults just grinned at each other without answering.

As it turned out, Captain America was a great cook. The food was amazing and Mr. Stark put more on his plate without Peter even having to ask. The teen could have laughed out loud when Mr. Rogers reminded him to eat his salad. Like he had to be told to eat when he could.

The pie Mr. Rogers had mentioned earlier was amazing as well and Peter had two whole slices. By the end of the meal, his stomach almost hurt from being so full. That hadn’t happened in ages.

The two heroes offered him to watch a movie with them, but by then, Peter was about to just fall over, so he excused himself to get ready for bed. Bed. After his shower, there was an actual bed waiting for him. Not a mattress on Ned’s floor, not a hard park bench, an actual bed.

Peter felt like crying when his head hit the soft pillow and he sunk into the mattress. He wanted to enjoy the moment for a bit longer, but his thoughts were already getting slower and he could feel sleep pressing his body down.

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“That,” Steve said, wiping down the kitchen counter, “Went surprisingly well.”

“Yes,” Tony agreed. “This is what it could be like. Now we just need to find a way to keep Peter with us.”

“Tomorrow,” Steve told him.

“Tomorrow.”

Chapter 8

Peter woke up surrounded by warmth. At first, he thought he was at Ned's, but the pillow was too soft and the room smelled different. The teen opened his eyes and was greeted by orange sun rays falling in through huge windows. Suddenly what had happened the day before came rushing back. He was at Stark Tower. Mr. Stark and Mr. Rogers were just down the hall. Peter smiled to himself, turned around and fell back asleep.

The second time he woke up, the sun was much higher in the sky. Peter slid out of bed and made a quick trip to the bathroom. When he was done, he walked over to his backpack, pulling out his shirt and... dammit. His only clean hoodies left were the ones he had been given by the superheroes.

Was it weird to walk down the stairs wearing Mr. Stark's clothes? What if the man wanted to have it back? Peter scolded himself for the thought. Mr. Stark could take it back whenever he wanted, Peter had no right to take even more from the man, but... but it would hurt to give up this little piece he had of his mentor. That little bit of safety he could take with him when he had to leave.

The teen took a deep breath and shrugged on the piece of clothing anyways. When he walked down the stairs, a heavenly smell of bacon, slightly burned toast and eggs hit him. Peter almost jumped down the last few steps excited for the day to start.

Just a few weeks ago, the scene that greeted him would have shocked the teen. Mr. Stark, the billionaire, was sitting at the table, wearing baggy sweatpants and a washed out band shirt. Across from him was Captain America in a tank top. It was all so... domestic.

"Hey sleepy head! We were wondering when you'd show up!", Mr. Stark greeted, making Peter blush. A quick glance at the clock on the wall told him it was almost noon.

The teen's smile froze when he noticed the empty plates and coffee cups on the table. Of course, they had already eaten. Peter had missed his chance. When he came closer, he noticed the few pieces of toast still sitting in the basket. Could he dare...?

"Mr. Rogers?", Peter whispered, but of course the super soldier picked it up.

"Yes, Peter?"

"May I...? Wold it be okay if..." The teen took a deep breath, steeling his nerves. "May I have some?", he asked, looking at the food.

Mr. Roger's expression darkened and Peter had to stop himself from taking a step back. He was about to apologize, but before he could, the man just got up and left.

"What?", Peter asked, looking at Mr. Stark, but the engineer looked just as angry as his husband, so the teen quickly avoided his gaze.

"Here," Peter looked up at Mr. Rogers, who was holding a plate. "This is your portion." The man took the toast out of the basket and stacked it on the plate before setting it down on the table next to Mr. Stark. "I will go make more toast. Would you like to have orange juice or chocolate milk?"

"Uh- I really don't need-"

"Doesn't matter, you can have both," the hero decided before rushing back to the kitchen.

Hesitantly Peter sat down and stared at his scrambled eggs. That was a lot. 3 eggs? Maybe 4? And 6 pieces of bacon. 2 pieces of toast and there was more to come. Holy shit.

“You better start eating before he comes back,” Mr. Stark told him with a smile, but his tone was firm, so Peter quickly picked up his fork.

“Thanks for breakfast, Mr. Rogers!”, the teen said when the Captain returned, and the angry look on his face softened a little.

“Of course, Peter. Just try to relax today, okay?”

“Relax? Don’t we have work to do, Mr. Stark?”, Peter wondered. Wasn’t that why he was here?

“The only work you should concentrate on today is homework,” Mr. Rogers told him sternly.

“Yeah, stay in school, kid,” Mr. Stark chimed in, reaching over to steal a bit of toast from Peter’s plate.

“Tony!”, Mr. Rogers gasped, making the billionaire rip his hand back like it had been burned. “Go get your own food!”

“No, no, it’s fine, I’m done!”, Peter said, quickly pushing away the still mostly full plate.

“Petey, if you don’t finish that, Stevie is going to divorce me, so please help me out and eat,” Mr. Stark told him. “And besides, I am not even hungry, I was just bored.”

Peter nodded, feeling a bit out of place. Not being hungry was so rare for him, he could barely remember what it was like to eat just because. Like when he had sneaked a few cookies off May’s baking tray in the holiday season or when Ned and he stuffed their face with candy after Halloween.

“When are you expecting me down here?”, Peter asked after he had finished his plate.

“What do you mean? Where are you going?”, Mr. Rogers asked.

“You told me to do my homework?”

“Oh yeah, well if you want to be alone that’s fine of course,” Mr. Rogers shrugged, “But didn’t you say you had an English essay to write? I could help you with that.”

“Are you sure?”, Peter wondered. “I’m used to doing it on my own.”

Mr. Stark and Mr. Rogers exchanged a strange look. “We know,” the billionaire sighed. “Just let us help, okay?”

.....

Tony dreaded what they had to do. Steve and he had spent the day helping Peter with his homework and chatting about school. The boy had gotten more and more comfortable with them and the billionaire didn’t want to give that up. All he wanted to do was go prepare dinner, have another meal with the kid, maybe watch a movie with him and then fall asleep, knowing Peter was safe.

But if they didn’t do it, Peter would not be safe. He would go back to being starved, ignored and hit. They had to find out what was going on with the kid.

“Peter? Would it be okay if we came in?”, Steve asked, leaning against the door frame, trying to appear casual.

The kid looked up from the book he had to read for class. “Uh? Sure?”

Steve and Tony entered the room and set down on the bed, to appear a little bit less threatening. Of course they were still muscular and powerful grown men, but at least they weren’t towering over the teenager.

“Peter, we have a few questions to ask. No matter what you say, you won’t get in trouble, okay?”, Tony started, giving the boy a gentle smile

“Y-Yeah, sure?”

“Kid, how many meals do you eat a day?”, Tony asked, going over the list of simple questions he and Steve had come up with.

“Three?”

“And you always get enough food at home?”, Steve continued, even though the answer was obvious.

Peter paled. “Is this about the food I took from the lab? Look, I’m really sorry-”

“No, no, we don’t care about that,” Steve quickly reassured him.

Tony took a deep breath and asked the question he really wanted to have answered. “Peter, when you do something wrong at home, what happens?”

A look of fear flashed over his face, before the kid’s expression became blank. “I get grounded?”

“Okay” Tony sighed. He had expected the lie. “Anything else? Does she yell a lot?”

“She?”

“Your aunt,” Steve clarified.

The boy flinched back at that, his expression becoming weary. “What are you trying to say? Just tell me, I don’t like you questioning me like this!”

“Peter, does your aunt hit you?”, Tony finally asked.

“What...?” For a second the teen looked confused and a little lost, then his gaze hardened. “No, she would never!”

“Look, we get she is your last living relative and you want to protect her,” Steve explained, leaning forward a little, “but it’s obvious something is wrong.”

Peter stood up. “Please leave me alone.”

“Kid...”, Tony sighed, also raising up. “You deserve better. You need someone to take care of you. She just left you and-”

“Shut up!” Tony flinched back at the boy’s sudden anger. He had never seen him like that. “How dare you speak about her like that?!”

“Peter, we-”, Steve tried, but was cut off.

“NO! You think just because you are rich and powerful you get to do what you want? You think you are better than me? Is that it?”

“Of course not!”, Tony defended himself. “Kid, we are just worried.”

“Well, then stop! I don’t need your fucking help!”

“Peter...”

“No!”, Peter hissed at Steve. “I’m leaving.” The man also stood up, putting himself between the teen and the door.

“Let. Me. Go,” Peter growled and swung his backpack over his shoulder.

“We can’t just-”

A dark and twisted smirk flashed over Peter’s face. “What are you gonna do, Cap? Hit me?”

“Son-”

“DON’T FUCKING CALL ME THAT!” Steve flinched back, allowing Peter to push past him. “I am no one’s son,” the kid told them before running down the stairs.

Both men just stared after him, until Tony recovered from the shock. “Fuck! Fri, where is Peter?”

“Mr. Parker is currently moving down the staircase. He will reach the lobby in approximately 7 minutes. Would you like me to stop him?”

“No,” Steve groaned. “He’s right. We can’t just trap him here.”

“Steve!”, Tony hissed. “He’s 15! And upset! What if something happens to him? What if-”, his voice broke off. “Steve, what if he never comes back? He hates us, we messed up.”

“He doesn’t hate us,” Steve said, but he didn’t sound confident. He walked over to the table and let his fingers trail over the book Peter had left behind. “He has to come back. To- To get this. He has to.”

“What if he thinks it’s not worth it?”

“The kid can’t get a new one,” Steve said darkly. “He doesn’t have the money.”

Tony stared at his husband for a moment, until his eyes widened.

“Shit... I didn’t mean-”, Steve groaned and let himself fall on the bed. “Are we like he said? Arrogant, rich assholes? Maybe we misjudged the situation? Maybe his aunt just doesn’t have the money to feed him?”

“What about the other abuse?”, Tony replied angrily. “There are too many signs to ignore what she is doing!”

“So... fear of physical touch and violence? Maybe it’s bullying?”

“Maybe...”, Tony closed his eyes and replayed everything that had happened in his head. “No. Or at least not just at school. The look on his face when we asked about punishments...”

“Yeah, I saw it too,” Steve nodded. “But he seemed honest when talking about his aunt.”

Tony snapped his fingers. “A partner! Maybe she has a new partner!” Then his face dropped. “I said that way too excitedly. I just want to find out what is going on so we can help.”

“Let’s give him a day to cool off,” Steve decided. “Tomorrow we can call him about the book and apologize for accusing his aunt.”

Tony nodded. They had a plan now, but his racing mind still wouldn’t quit. “I’m going to the workshop!”, he snapped, fleeing out of the room that was supposed to be Peter’s.

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Peter’s breathing simply wouldn’t calm down. He had been sitting in the dark corner under the bridge for almost 30 minutes now, and he still couldn’t stop crying.

He had lost it all. Peter had messed up and now he was all alone. It wasn’t like he didn’t deserve to feel like this, but he was selfish, so he wanted it to stop.

There were only two options. Either they believed him and he would never see them again, or they would figure it out and he’d be sent back to the Michels.

No. Peter wouldn’t go back. He’d run away, far enough so no one would find him.

He’d never see Ned again. Or at least not for a few years. Or MJ. She had smiled at him yesterday and even admitted he wasn’t that lame.

The best possible outcome was that they hated him. If Mr. Stark and Mr. Rogers just ignored him from now on, he’d just go back to the life he had before.

A new wave of tears hit, so Peter just closed his eyes and let himself drown in it.

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The rest of the day was hell. Steve was going insane with guilt and worry, but there was nothing he could do. After hiding in the workshop for a few hours, Tony at least came out to have dinner with him, but he quickly disappeared once they had eaten. Steve understood why his husband was doing it. He didn’t want company either.

Shortly before midnight, the soldier couldn’t take it anymore, so he put on some sweatpants and his running shoes. He’d probably have to run for hours to even feel a bit tired, but he had to do something to distract himself.

As it turned out, it didn’t take that long for him to find something else to concentrate on. Steve was passing by a bridge, when he heard a voice. A young boy. He simply had to stop and listen in on the angry conversation that was going on.

“Listen, kid. Just hand it over and we won’t have a problem,” a deeper voice growled.

“Sir, I can share, but I’m hungry too...”, the child pleaded.

Steve frowned. Two homeless people? He walked closer until he could make out the silhouette of a huge man towering over a smaller person.

“Listen here, you little...”, the man grabbed the kid, making Steve see red.

“HEY!”, he shouted, making the guy let go of the boy and stumble off into the darkness.

When Steve came closer, he pulled out his phone to use it as a flashlight. There was an opened chocolate bar on the ground, probably what the two had been fighting over. Steve lifted the phone and recognized the messy curls and the dark blue hoodie Tony had bought for Steve a few years ago.

“Peter?”

Chapter 9

“Peter?”

He slowly turned around, just to be greeted by a blinding light, but he didn't need to see the face of the man standing in front of him in order to recognize him. Just as slowly as he had turned, Peter reached down to grip his backpack. Then, he whirled around and sprinted away, hoping to be able to reach the bushes and disappear.

“You can't outrun me, kid,” Mr. Rogers told him as he easily passed him and cut his way off.

‘Oh, but I could,’ Peter thought to himself, but then he'd give away that Captain America wasn't the only enhanced person there. If he let himself be captured, Peter might get a chance to escape later.

“Please sir, just let me go, I won't make any trouble,” he tried to plead, but it didn't do him any good.

“I can't do that, son. I'm taking you back to the tower, and then we can talk.”

Dread settled in his stomach, but there was nothing he could do. Peter didn't want to follow the angry man to a space where he could easily be trapped. “Yes, sir.”

“Peter? You know I'm not gonna hurt you, right? Tony and I are just trying to help.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

Mr. Rogers let out a sad little sigh. Peter flinched back a little. Sad wasn't good, but at least the man wasn't angry. Yet.

“Okay,” Mr. Roger said, “Let's go home.”

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Tony was making himself yet another cup of coffee, when the elevator door slid open.

“Steve! I can't take this anymore! I'm so worried about the-” He stopped in the middle of his sentence, his mouth falling open when he saw who was trailing behind his husband. “Kid?!”

After a second, his shock was replaced by worry as he took in the boy's pale face and empty eyes. “Peter? Are you hurt?”

“No, sir.”

Tony's eyes snapped to Steve. “What happened?” Something was clearly very, very wrong with their boy. “Is he okay?”

“Physically? Yes,” Steve said, making Tony worry even more.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

Instead of answering his question, the Captain gestured for Peter to sit down on the couch. The way the boy moved was strange. Like in a trance. His eyes were still staring ahead like he couldn't even see them.

“You must be cold, sweetheart,” Steve said softly, tucking a blanket around the kid. “Just relax, okay? Tony and I will be back in a minute. He gestured for Tony to follow him into the kitchen.

“Steve, what happened?”, Tony asked.

“Not sure. I was just going for a run, when I found him under a bridge. Once I made it clear he was coming with me, he gave up all fight and started acting like... that,” Steve answered, gesturing to the boy on the sofa.

“What was he doing out there in the middle of the night?”, Tony wondered.

The look on his husband’s face made him fear the worst. “Tony, from what it looks like, Peter is homeless.”

“H-Homeless?”, the billionaire repeated. “No, he said-”

“He was lying,” Steve cut him off.

“That’s...” Tony thought about it for a moment. “I can work with that.”

“What is that supposed to mean? Tony, our kid was just- out there! All alone!”

“Look at it this way, before we found out he was homeless, we thought we had to try to take him away from his abuser without putting him in danger, right? Well, looks like he’s not with them, so he’s... up for the take. We can just keep him.”

“That,” Steve said darkly, “Is both frightening and reassuring. Let’s just make sure he’s okay.”

They went back to the living room, where Peter was still sitting on the sofa, his gaze a bit less empty and his fingers now wrapped around the edge of the blanket.

“Peter?”, Tony asked carefully.

“Hello Mr. Stark,” the kid said, looking at him with a bitter little smile.

“Well, I think you can just call me Tony now.”

The kid nodded, but didn’t say anything else.

“So... You don’t live with your aunt?”, Steve started once the two men had sat down in the armchairs across from Peter.

The kid looked at him, then at Steve, and finally let his eyes drop to the floor. “Friday?”

“Yes Peter?”

“I- I can’t say it. Please just look up May Parker and show them.”

After a second the TV screen lit up, showing a police report. Tony quickly skimmed it, his heart clenching painfully when he realized Peter had lost his last living relative more in a burglary attempt.

“Oh honey... That was a year ago,” Steve whispered sadly.

“We have to call someone,” Tony added.

“No!” Suddenly the kid was standing and Tony feared he would run away again. “I’m not hurting anyone! I- I know what you must think of me, but that one time in the lab was the only time I ever stole something, I promise! You don’t have to call the police!”

“The cops?”, Tony wondered. “Hell, of course I’m not calling the cops on a 15 year old. We are technically law enforcement anyways. I was thinking CPS.”

Instead of calming down, the boy started shaking his head, his eyes wandering to the door.

“Peter-”, Steve tried, and the teen’s eyes snapped to him.

“You said you wouldn’t hurt me! If you send me back, they will hurt me!”

Ah, there it was. Peter was finally admitting someone had abused him. “Who, Peter?”

The kid’s shoulders dropped and he sat down again, making himself as small as possible- “You won’t believe me...”

“We know they hit you,” Steve stated simply. “We already believe you, we just want to know the whole story.”

Peter just shook his head, his knees coming up to his chest as he let his chin drop down, completely closing off.

“Fri?”, Tony sighed, knowing there was no way the kid would talk to them.

“Peter Parker has been in foster care since the death of his aunt. He was placed with Mary and John Michel.” Friday paused, and when she continued, her voice sounded almost angry. “There have been reports of Mr. Parker displaying disrespectful and violent behavior. He has been reported as a runaway five months ago.”

“Five months...”, Steve repeated horrified.

“I didn’t do it. Please, I didn’t do anything,” Peter whispered quietly, rocking himself back and forth.

This didn’t make any sense. Peter was the best kid Tony had ever met. “Violent behavior...?”

“No!”, the boy yelled, his eyes snapping up, fearfully darting between the adults. “No I didn’t! I promise! Please just let me go.”

“Peter, you can’t keep living like this,” Steve said sternly. “You need a home. And food. You need-”

“What’s the difference?”, the boy cut him off, sounding desperate now. “I was starving then, and I am starving now. At least out there I have a chance to find my own food. I’m better off alone than in a house with a locked fridge.”

“God...”, Steve whispered, sounding just as horrified as Tony felt.

“Just give me a chance!”, Peter begged. “Please let me go, I just want a chance to survive!”

“We are not letting you go,” Tony said firmly, staring him directly in the eyes. “But we are also not calling CPS. You stay with us.”

“N-No, I can’t force you to do that. I don’t want that.” Peter looked almost more upset than before.

“Just let me go!”

“Okay, let’s calm down,” Steve stopped them, using his Captain voice. “You are not forcing us to do anything. You ran away because you wanted to have enough food and not be hit, right?”

The kid flinched at the words, but nodded.

“Great!”, Steve said, a blinding smile taking over his face. “We can give you that, easily, without any effort. Anything else, we can figure out together.”

Peter nodded and relaxed, before immediately tensing up again. His face froze, like he was steeling himself for an impossible task. “Can- Can I ask for something? Something big?”, he whispered.

Tony gave him a nod, leaning forward with interest.

“Can I keep going to school?”

Had the situation not been so horrifying, Tony would have laughed. “And they tried to make people believe you, of all people, are a trouble maker?”

“Of course you are staying in school, Peter,” Steve agreed.

Peter shook his head. “No, I meant... Can I keep going to MY school? I don’t want to lose my friends. If you tell someone I ran away, I might lose the scholarship.”

Now Tony actually let out a chuckle. “First of all, you don’t need any scholarships, obviously I got it covered.”

“But Mr. Stark, that’s a lot of money!”, Peter protested, looking terrified by the idea.

“And I am literally made of money.”

“There is nothing you have to worry about anymore,” Steve promised. “We’re taking care of you now. Just relax.”

“Thanks, Mr. Rogers.”

“Steve,” the Captain said with a soft smile.

“Steve,” Peter repeated awkwardly.

“Wait, does this mean you didn’t have dinner?”, Steve asked after a moment, already getting up.

They let the kid stay on the sofa while eating. It had just been half a day since he ran away, yet he already seemed extremely hungry.

Tony raised an eyebrow when Peter took off Steve’s hoodie, to reveal Tony’s underneath. “Two hoodies?”

The boy shrugged. “It’s a cold night today and I don’t have enough money saved for a jacket.”

Sadness clenched the engineer’s heart, but his chest immediately got lighter when he heard the whispered “And they make me feel safe.”

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After feeding the kid and bringing him back to the room where he had belonged all along, Tony and Steve retreated to their own room, exhaustion finally settling in.

“That’s not the kind of look I want to get from you when taking my clothes off,” Tony joked when he noticed his husband looking at him strangely.

Steve’s face turned red. “Sorry, that’s not- I was just-”

“Babe, I know,” Tony grinned, amused by the fact he could still make the other man flustered. “What’s wrong?”

“I just had a really terrible thought.”

“Uhh, now I’m intrigued!”, Tony commented with a wink.

“I-”, Steve began but immediately stopped himself. “You know I love you for your personality, right?”

“Not my breathtaking good looks?”, Tony pouted.

“Those too,” the other man chuckled.

“Where is this going, Steve?”

His husband let out a frustrated breath. “I am so fucking glad you are rich.”

“That... Was unexpected,” Tony frowned in confusion.

“Tony, he- he was starving!”, Steve said, his voice raising a bit. “And freezing! Growing up, we didn’t have a lot of money, but it never got that bad. At least I had my Ma and Buck. A roof over my head. At least one warm meal a day. But Peter had nothing! I knew hunger, I knew the cold, but never like that!”

“What has that to do with me?”, Tony asked softly.

Steve took two long steps across the room and placed a hand on his cheek. “You can provide for him. I am so grateful for that. Our kid will be fed. And warm. And safe.”

“And loved,” the billionaire added, his eyes dropping down.

“Tony?”

“Maybe your Ma didn’t have a lot of money, but she had so much love to give,” Tony looked up again, unsure how to explain. “I- I want Peter to feel loved, but I don’t know how to do that. Healthy parenting. So I guess I am glad you are less screwed up than me.”

Steve gave him a look, making Tony roll his eyes. “Okay, less screwed up in that area.”

“I’m glad you are smart.”

“Yeah?”, Tony grinned.

“Peter is obviously a genius,” Steve pointed out. “That’s how you found him, after all. I’m so happy you will be able to encourage and support him the way he needs.”

“I’m glad you are an artist.”

Steve's face twisted up in concentration for a moment, before he shook his head. "Okay, now you've lost me."

"Photography," Tony explained. "Peter told me he used to be into it. I think he stopped because he had to sell the camera. I can appreciate a pretty picture, but I don't see the world like you two do. He's my intern and helps me a lot. It'll be good for him to connect with you over something we can't profit off. I want him to feel like a person, not a tool."

"You are already doing that. He won't grow up like you did," Steve reassured him.

"No, he won't," Tony said with determination.

"So the two of us together will make pretty good parents?", Steve smiled.

"Parents, huh?", Tony grinned. "I thought the plan was to provide food and shelter and otherwise ignore him?", he asked, referring to Steve's earlier words.

His husband laughed at that. "Damn, that kid is so gullible." Then his face dropped. "Probably because he is used to receiving even less care."

"Probably," Tony agreed sadly.

"Well, now that he is not a flight risk anymore," Steve decided, "We can give him all the affection he deserves. It'll take a while for him to get used to it, but we won't give up."

"No," Tony agreed. "We won't."

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Just some important talks :)

Peter had been awake for about an hour, but he wasn't sure if he should leave his room or not. Part of him wished they had just put him in a guest room in the lower levels, far away from the two heroes. Neither Mr. Stark, not Mr. Rogers had given him any rules, so even going to the bathroom was a risk.

When he couldn't take it anymore, Peter crept across the hallway, trying to be as quick and quiet as possible. As it turned out, he had failed. When he opened the door, both men were waiting for him.

"Peter," Mr. Stark greeted.

The boy immediately let his eyes drop down and straightened up. "Sir."

"Just Tony is fine," the man said, but his voice was strangely strained, making Peter think he should probably be extra careful.

"We just wanted to check if pancakes for breakfast are okay?"

Breakfast? Right, those two seemed okay with wasting food on him. "Yes, si-" Peter stopped himself before messing up again. "Steve."

"Why don't you come downstairs when you are ready and we prepare breakfast?", Steve said softly, making Peter lift his eyes. When he looked at the blond man he remembered all the times he had visited the lab to chat with Peter, the time he had helped him with homework and the way he's smile at him with warm eyes. Still, the teen felt dread fill him at the thought of living with the hero. Instead of answering, he quickly retreated to his room to get ready.

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"That was strange, right?", Steve asked Tony when they went downstairs. "The way he looked at us?"

"Yes," his husband agreed. "He wasn't this distant before. Maybe it's just shock?"

"Maybe," Steve hummed. "Let's just keep an eye on it. We knew this wouldn't be easy."

He started making breakfast while Tony watched something on his phone and occasionally stole his ingredients to annoy him. He only stopped when Steve threatened to make him eat the whole block of butter for breakfast if he didn't let him cook in peace.

A few minutes before Steve was done, Peter came down the stairs. Tony gestured for him to sit down at the table and they waited for the Captain to carry in the plate with the freshly cooked pancakes.

Unlike dinner on Friday when the kid had filled his own plate after the adults had taken some food

or the morning before when he had asked for toast, Peter simply stared ahead while Tony and Steve both put syrup and whipped cream on their pancakes.

“Son? Here, take some too,” Steve encouraged the boy, pushing the plate towards him.

“Thank you, sir,” Peter replied quietly, still not meeting his eyes and took a single pancake from the huge stack. He tried to pull his plate towards him, but was stopped by Tony gripping it. Immediately he let go and hid his hands under the table. The billionaire gave Steve a sad look and piled more food on Peter’s plate.

Peter didn’t speak for the rest of the meal, but Tony and Steve started making conversation, trying to stay on topics that wouldn’t make him feel excluded.

“Alright, time to clean up!”, Steve declared when all pancakes were gone, clapping his hands.

In contrast to everything else that had been said that morning, this seemed to get Peter’s attention. His head snapped up and he quickly stood up, already gathering up the plates and bottles. “Yes, sir!”

Steve lifted his plate and held it away from the boy when he reached out for it. “All of us, Peter. You just have to take what you already picked up to the kitchen, alright? Tony and I will do the rest.”

In the kitchen, Tony started putting things in the fridge and cabinets, while Steve organized the items in the dish washer.

A loud crash made the Captain whirl around. The plate Peter had just been holding was shattered on the ground, pieces spilled all over the floor. The boy himself was staring down, frozen in place. His hands began to shake and he slowly looked up at Steve, his eyes even more afraid than the time he had witnessed him having a panic attack.

“Oh! Silly me!”, Steve chuckled, trying to keep his voice light despite his own panic. “I must have knocked that over!”

The look in Peter’s eyes did not disappear, but Steve could hear him suck in a sharp breath.

“That’s dangerous,” Steve commented, gesturing to the sharp edges of broken ceramic surrounding them and Peter’s feet, only protected by thin socks. “Why don’t you go sit down in the living room, while I take care of this?”

The boy gave him a sharp nod and a whispered “Yes, sir,” and fled the room.

Before getting out the broom to clean up, Steve turned to his husband, who’s eyes were darting between him and the mess on the floor. “You too, love. Take a break, I’ve got this.”

Tony nodded, the fear in his eyes ebbing away as he wrapped his arms around Steve in a quick hug, before returning to the dining table.

Steve carefully cleaned up, giving his boys a moment to collect themselves. Last night he had had a long conversation with Tony about how having Peter around would bring up his own issues. Usually their relationship was going smoothly, but certain changes brought up too many bad memories for the man. Like moving in together, the engagement or housing another victim of parental abuse.

When Steve was done, he returned to Tony’s side, who was looking at the kid with worry. Peter

was sitting on the sofa, his back perfectly straight, staring ahead.

“We gotta check what’s going on,” the engineer told Steve. “Something changed.”

The two men walked over to the teenager and sat down in the armchairs, just like the night before.

“Hey, Peter?”, Steve tried, causing the kid’s eyes to snap to him.

“Yes, sir?”

“Why are you calling us that? You didn’t before, at least not this much,” Tony blurted out, a frown drawing his eyebrows together.

“I’m sorry, I forgot I’m not supposed to.”

“It’s okay,” the billionaire was quick to reassure him. “But... what changed? You seem... different this morning.”

“I... I am not sure how to act. What do you want me to do, Tony?”

“We just want to understand,” Steve pleaded.

“I live here now, right?”, Peter asked.

“Of course.”

“Which makes you... You two kinda are-”

“Like foster parents,” Steve realized.

He remembered all too well how Tony had changed after accepting his proposal. At first Steve had feared Tony regretted it, but then his fiancée had broken down in his arms, admitting how scared and confused he was. ‘He was married to my mother, and he hurt her so much,’ Tony had confessed. In his head, Steve had taken on Howard’s role.

“Peter, what was it like living with your aunt?”, Tony asked gently.

The boy drew his shoulders up and let his eyes drop down. “Good, I guess.”

“Did she ever hit you?”

“No!”, Peter snapped. “I told you-”

“It’s okay, we believe you,” Steve said quickly, not sure where his husband was going with this.

“Don’t worry darling,” Tony told the kid, “I’m just trying to make a point. So, did she ever starve you?”

“No?”

“Scare you?”

“No.”

“Yell at you?”

“Only sometimes. Like the time I almost fell out of the window.”

“Okay,” Tony said softly. “Sounds like a good guardian. That is the kind of life Steve and I want to give you. We know we can’t replace her, but we won’t be like your other foster family.”

“Okay,” Peter said, sounding a bit less stressed, but it was clear he had still not wrapped his head around the concept.

“Peter, I’m sorry we have to do this, but we need some information from you,” Steve added after a minute.

“Information?”

“About the Michels,” Tony explained.

“No.”

“Kid-”

“Please don’t. It’s over, let’s just forget about it.”

“It is over,” Steve agreed. “But we all know you won’t be able to just forget about it. I promise, no matter what you tell us, you are safe.”

A tear rolled down the boy’s face, but eventually he nodded.

“Okay, so... food,” Tony started awkwardly. “You said the fridge was locked?”

“N-Not at first,” Peter whispered. “I took too much.”

“Somehow,” Steve said gently, “I don’t believe that. Why don’t you start at the beginning. You lived with them for 8 months, right?”

“Yeah,” The boy confirmed. “At first it was normal. I made my own breakfast and lunch, but had dinner with them. Then Mrs. Mitchel said I talk too much, so I had to eat in my room.”

“Just for the record,” Tony chimed in when Peter got quiet for a moment, “We love to hear about what you think.”

The look of disbelief and confusion he got in return was heartbreaking. “Because I was not at the table, they decided they didn’t need to make extra and I could just wait and see if there were leftovers.”

“Leftovers?”, Tony repeated, sounding just as devastated as Steve felt.

“There never were any,” Peter shrugged. One night, after I had been with them for a few months, I went to the fridge to get myself a sandwich or something...”

“You got caught?”

“Mr. Michel was still awake.”

“Peter,” Steve said gently, “What did he do to you?”

“He- He got angry a lot. At least once a day, but it was worst at the weekends when he was home all day. He- He would-”, the boy tried to bring himself to say it, but he seemed to not be able to.

“It’s okay,” Tony reassured him. “I just need to know, did you ever see a doctor?”

Peter shook his head. "It was never permanent. I heal fast."

Steve frowned at that. It was not something the kid should know about himself. "Okay. So right now you are feeling okay? No pain or discomfort?"

The boy shook his head, making Steve's chest a bit lighter.

"May I ask what made you decide to leave? Did something change?", Tony asked.

"She locked the windows," Peter whispered, suddenly sounding even more scared than before. "I used to sneak out to find my own food and... be free. But then she put locks on the windows."

"How did you manage to hide from CPS and still go to school?", Tony wondered, making Peter tense up.

"It's alright, you're not in trouble. We would have liked it better if you had talked to someone, but we are glad you stayed in school despite everything that was going on," Steve tried to reassure him.

"No one gets in trouble?", Peter asked, a bit of fire returning to his sad eyes.

"No one," the super soldier repeated, even though he wasn't sure what the kid was talking about.

"Ned helped me, but he didn't know! It's not his fault. He thinks I just don't want to bother the Michels with my school stuff."

"Hold up!", Tony interrupted. "Not even your best friend knows? Have you been dealing with this all on your own?"

Peter nodded, making anger flash through Steve's body. Peter had probably not even allowed himself to have a shoulder to cry on for over a year. And it was all the fault of those people. He'd enjoy watching his husband destroy them.

"What exactly did you do anyways?", Tony wondered.

When Peter didn't respond, Steve realized something. "Peter, we won't be angry if it was something illegal. We are just so damn glad you survived."

"But... you're the Avengers."

"Exactly," Tony grinned. "Whatever you did is below our pay grade anyways. I doubt it involved aliens or Hydra."

"No," Peter said, a slight smile tucking on his lips. "Just some hacking."

"Hacking?"

"Of government computers...", the boy added. "Stopped the communication between CPS and the school then answered all emails myself."

"Impressive!", Tony complimented, seemingly happy about the crime. To be honest, Steve was not upset either. He was just glad his boy had found a way to escape.

"How did you answer so quickly?", Tony frowned. "One time I emailed the address the school gave me and you answered within 5 minutes, even though you were working in the lab..."

"AI."

“Excuse me?!”

“Tony...”, Steve warned when the kid flinched back a bit.

“Peter, did you write a program to answer the messages by itself?”, his husband asked, completely ignoring him.

“Ned did most of it. We borrowed some code from existing systems and-”

“Borrowed?”

“Not like we were selling it...”

“Okay, you guys can discuss this later,” Steve stopped them when he noticed how uncomfortable the boy seemed. Thank you for being honest with us, Peter. Would you like to take a break?”

As soon as the words had left his mouth, Peter was already on his way back to his room.

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They allowed him about an hour of rest, before there was a knock on his door. “Petey? Could you please come to the living room for a moment?”, Tony requested.

Downstairs, both men were already waiting for him.

“Yes, sirs?”, Peter asked, sitting down on his spot on the sofa again, preparing himself for another interrogation.

“We just wanted to have a talk,” Steve said, his voice sounding a bit exhausted. “As your new guardians, Tony and I believe we should set some rules.”

“Of course, s-”, Peter started but stopped himself. “Of course, Steve.”

“After what you have told us, Stevie and I realized you probably value your freedom a lot,” Tony started, surprising Peter. “As long as you take your phone with you, answer texts and calls and are back before 8 pm on school nights and 10 on weekends, you can leave any time you want.”

“As long as homework gets done!”, Steve added, probably going for a stern look, but failing.

“That’s what you wanted to tell me?”, Peter wondered. He had expected something far worse.

“There is more,” Tony promised. “We have breakfast every day at 7 before you leave for school. Before that, you need to pack your bag and get dressed. Happy will drive you to school afterwards and pick you up.”

“Can’t I just take the subway?”, Peter asked, secretly planning on swinging to school in his suit.

“Maybe next week,” Steve told him. “Let’s all settle in first.”

“Okay, so... go to school, be home on time and do my homework?”, Peter repeated, surprised by how easy it all sounded. “Anything else?”

“Well, here are some other house rules, but they are mostly for us,” Tony answered.

“For you?”

“Number one: no violence, ever. Neither of us will ever lay a hand on you,” Tony started.

Peter’s eyes widened. “What if I break the other rules?”

“We will not hurt you,” Steve said forcefully. “We might ground you, or-”, he stopped when he noticed Peter panicking. “Not like they did. Rule number two is, we will never take food away from you. No matter what.”

“What if-”

“Never,” both men said in unison.

“Rule number three,” Tony continued, “We are here to make sure you are safe and happy. We are not perfect, but we will do our best. That means we will try not to yell or be mean in any way.”

“And rule number four, the most important one,” Steve added, his tone even more serious than before. “Should either of us ever do anything to hurt you, tell us. Or someone else. Happy, one of the Avengers, Friday... just let someone know.”

Peter stared at them, feeling his resistance starting to crumble. “No yelling? You won’t get mad?”

“What is it you need, kiddo?”, Tony asked him, his eyes warm and open.

“Remember when I cut my arm?”

“Yes, I am sorry for reacting the way I did. Steve did a far better job,” Tony sighed.

“He did,” Peter admitted. “I- uh- I liked it. What you did,” Peter told Steve, hoping he wasn’t messing up already.

“Petey...”, the man whispered, sounding amazed. “Are you asking for a hug?”

Peter nodded, ducking his head to shield himself from a blow that never came. Instead, huge, warm arms settled around him as the sofa dipped down next to him, letting him slide into the Captain’s side.

“This is nice,” he whispered resting his cheek on Steve’s chest. He let his eyes stay open, watching Tony with curiosity, who looked a little uncomfortable. Peter looked up at Steve, then back at his mentor, hoping the blond would know what to do.

“Tones,” Steve chuckled, “I think his other side is getting cold.”

Tony’s eyes widened. “Kid, would it be okay if-”

“Yes!”, Peter told him and smiled when another weight settled next to him and Tony’s arm settled around his shoulders. He closed his eyes, not worrying about anything for the first time in over a year.

Chapter 11

The next morning happened just the way Steve and Tony had promised. Peter got dressed and packed his bag for school. Using the new backpack Mr. Stark had insisted on giving him was weird. For months now, having his things on him had been essential to surviving and suddenly he was supposed to just leave them at Stark Tower? Peter packed his money and an extra hoodie, just to be sure.

Downstairs, Tony and Steve were waiting for him with a far less extravagant breakfast than they had on the weekend, but Peter was definitely not going to complain. Especially not when Steve handed him a sandwich and an apple before ruffling his hair and wishing him a good day at school. The quick hug and promise to find time to help him with his physics project from Tony was also not something Peter would ever not be grateful for.

“Hello, Mr. Hogan. Thank you for driving me,” the teen said politely as he walked towards the car in the garage.

“You don’t have to thank me kid, this is my job. What Tony says goes,” the man grumbled as he got in the drivers seat. “And besides,” he added, “I told you before, call me Happy. From what I heard, you are family now.”

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Ned frowned when Peter turned down his offer to share his lunch again and pulled out his own sandwich instead.

“I thought you hate the bread your foster mother buys?”, he wondered.

“Well...”, Peter looked really conflicted for a moment. “So, about this thing. The big thing I can’t talk about?”

Ned nodded, worry clenching his chest.

“Something happened. Something big.”

“Good or bad?”

An unsure little smile flashed over Peter’s face. “Good? I think? It’s too early to say but... Ned, if I get this right, I might be okay.”

Ned pulled his best friend into a tight hug. “And if it ends badly, I’ll be there for you.”

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“Test complete. Probability of failure: 20%”

“20?!”, Tony shrieked at Friday, then just shook his head in frustration. “Ugh, whatever. We will continue after I got another coffee.”

“Don’t you want to use Mr. Parker’s device? I must say, I am a fan of it,” the AI declared.

The words made Tony stop in his tracks. “That’s it!”, he hissed. “I’m reprogramming you!”

Nothing happened.

“Friday!”

“Boss?”, the AI asked.

“I’m reprogramming you,” Tony repeated. “Open the basic protocols.”

“Oh, you actually meant that,” Friday answered, sounding confused and almost worried. “What would you like to change?”

“The priority settings.”

“Boss...?”, the AI said slowly. “My current priority is the safety of everyone in the building, closely followed by fulfilling your direct orders.”

“Well, safety should stay number one,” Tony grumpily agreed, “but put the boy as number two.”

“Boss?”, Friday asked once more, seemingly confused by the order.

“Peter Parker’s physical and mental well-being has to be ensured,” Tony said sternly. “Any order can be overwritten by that directive.”

“That was always the plan, boss,” the AI sing-sanged. “Anything else?”

Tony nodded, the dread that had been building in him for the past few days finally breaking through to the surface. “I need your help, Fri. I forget important dates, I lock myself in here for days at a time, I get moody...”, he trailed off, his throat closing up a little. “Don’t let me fail him.”

“So you’d like me to remind you of things like your promise to help him with school work today?”

“Fuck!”, Tony screamed. “The physics project! Do I still have time?”

“Boss, Peter left for school just 2 hours ago,” the AI explained gently. “He won’t be home for a while.”

“Oh...”, Tony said, checking the time. Friday was right, it wasn’t even noon yet. “What is the probability of me forgetting again before he comes home?!”

“I do not have a lot of data on your interactions with Mr. Parker, but he seems to have the ability to capture your attention,” Friday stated. “Nevertheless, the probability is still between 50 and 70%.”

“And with you helping me?”, the engineer smirked.

“0%”, his AI answered coldly, and he knew she was right, especially with her new overwriting abilities.

“Good... Fri?”, Tony whispered, feeling a bit too emotional for louder words.

“Yes boss?”, the AI whispered back.

“Do you think I will fail him?”

“I don’t think you’ll need much assistance, but if it eases your mind, I won’t let you.”

“Thanks Fri.”

“Of course, Tony.”

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The next few days were difficult. Steve and Tony did their best to earn Peter's trust, but it had been broken so severely before, he would take a while to heal. When he flinched back from them or was still surprised they took the time to ask about his day or help him with his homework, Steve just press his eyes shut and repeated his new mantra: food, shelter, peace. That was what he had promised their kid the night he had agreed to stay. No matter what, this was what they could give him.

Even if Peter still didn't take food without direct permission, even if he still flinched at loud noises, even if he still kept his head down and called them 'sir' at times, this was better than what he had before. Their boy had a real home now.

Thursday night, Steve couldn't sleep, so he decided to go downstairs to make himself a cup of tea. To his surprise, there was a bit of light falling through the open door. He decided to be extra quiet and slowly crept through the dark living room. As Steve came closer, he heard the sound of the fridge door opening.

The super soldier's eyes fell on Peter, who was taking an apple out of the fruit bowl now and placing it on a plate. Just as Steve was about to leave, the kid turned around, immediately spotting him.

"Mr. Rogers! I- I can explain!", the kid gasped, jumping back, his back pressing against the wall.

"Peter-"

"Sir, please!" There were tears welling up in the boy's eyes and suddenly Steve realized the similarities to the story the kid had told them about his foster father.

"Peter, it's okay. I won't hurt you, okay?"

"St- Steve?", the kid whispered, his eyes focusing a bit.

"Hey Petey. Why don't we-"

"Honey? Are you down there?", his husband's voice interrupted him.

"No!", Peter sobbed. "No, not him too. Please Steve!"

"Okay, okay," the soldier nodded and quickly put the plate on the fridge and out of sight. "He doesn't have to know."

"Peter? Steve? Is everything okay?", Tony asked when he entered the kitchen, his hair a mess and his almost closed to protect himself from the light.

Peter whimpered, backing away from the man and hiding behind Steve.

"Yes honey, everything is fine," Steve said, reaching behind him to take Peter's hand.

"What's going on?", Tony whispered shocked when Peter busted into tears, clutching Steve's hand tightly and pressing his face into the man's hoodie.

Steve ignored the question in order to turn around and pull the trembling boy into his arms.

"I'm sorry! Please just let me go back to bed, okay? I will be good!", the kid told him, his eyes darting between him and his husband.

“Nothing to apologize for. Come on, I’ll bring you upstairs,” Steve told the kid and lifted him into his arms. “I’ve got this, just go back to bed,” he told Tony, who looked confused and distressed by Peter’s reaction.

Steve carried Peter upstairs and sat down on the bed, the boy still clinging to him. He only let go when he heard the door of the master-bedroom fall shut behind Tony.

“Stay here, I’ll be back in a minute,” Steve whispered to Peter and carefully sat him down on the bed. Then he made his way back downstairs, quickly finding what he was looking for.

Steve took the plate down from the top of the fridge, mustering the food with interest. An apple, one slice of toast, two strawberries, a tiny amount of butter and a tomato. The kid was clever, no one would have noticed anything was missing, as he only took a little bit of everything.

“There you go,” Steve said once he was back upstairs, handing Peter the plate.

The kid’s eyes widened, as he reached out for the food. “Thank you, Mr. Rogers.”

“Hey, Peter?”, Steve said, wondering how to bring up the topic tactfully.

“Yes, sir?”

“Remember when we told you we’d show you the Avengers levels soon?”

The boy nodded, his eyes wide with wonder instead of fear now.

“I think we should do that tomorrow,” Steve decided. “You wanna know what’s really cool about the common room?”

“What?”, the boy asked, still sounding nervous, but now also a bit excited.

“There is a fridge. And many cabinets. They get restocked automatically. Two super soldiers and a god eat there. No one knows how much food is taken.”

Peter seemed to understand what he was offering, his eyes filling up with tears again.

“Goodnight, son,” Steve whispered as he gave him one last hug.

“Goodnight, Steve,” Peter whispered back. “Thank you.”

“Anytime,” the hero assured him. “Sleep well,” he said, closing the door behind him.

Steve took a deep breath, going from one bedroom with a distressed boy in it to the next.

“What the hell was that about? Is he hurt? Did he have a nightmare? Why was he crying? Did you-”

He held up a hand to stop his husband’s rambling. “I took care of it.”

“Steve! You can’t just-”

“Look Tony,” Steve sighed, “I promise Peter is okay. Let me prove it,” he picked up his phone, pressing the button that allowed him to connect to the AI running the tower. “Friday, you have seen everything that happened in the kitchen, right?”

“Of course, Cap,” The smooth voice answered immediately.

“And you can confirm that Peter is okay and I handled the situation?”

“Also correct.”

“Fine,” Tony hissed, letting himself fall down on the bed. “I will stop panicking, but you owe me an explanation!”

“Darling, I’m sorry but I can’t, he won’t want you to know,” Steve pleaded.

“Yeah, cause that’s not suspicious at all,” his husband grumbled.

“Okay, I’ll give you an abstract version,” Steve decided, “I came downstairs and Peter got upset. I told him he had nothing to worry about and calmed him down. When you showed up he got scared again, so he clung to me. Now he’s back in his room, not scared anymore. Is that enough for you?”

Tony looked up at him, a strange mixture of sadness and fear in his eyes. “So... It wasn’t me he was upset about?”

“What?”, Steve asked surprised. “Why are you asking?”

“Stevie... He was hiding from me. Behind you.”

Now Steve understood what the scene in the kitchen must have looked like. “Oh sweetheart... I was just there first, that’s all,” he said, laying down next to Tony and pulling him into his chest.

“So I didn’t mess up? We didn’t mess up? Peter has everything he needs?”

“Yes. We’ve got a long way to go, but we are on the right path,” Steve promised.

Chapter 12

The first week of Peter living at the tower had passed, and so far, both adults had kept all their promises. They had gone far beyond actually. Steve had promised the teen a warm bed, food and no violence, but Peter had gotten so much more.

Tony had insisted on buying him new clothes and a new backpack, alongside some books and school supplies. Peter had tried to refuse, but the man had insisted. It made the teen somewhat uncomfortable, but he had to admit, the gifts would help when... when he had to leave.

The thought hurt. The billionaire and the supper soldier had not only given him everything he needed to live, they had also started to become part of that life. Breakfast, Dinner, and easy conversation or help with homework in between, Each of them had spent at least an hour with him every day. After the pressing loneliness of the streets, it was strange to be so completely surrounded by their presence.

Peter had still not given Ned an explanation of what was going on, but he started to want to tell his best friend what had happened. That he had found a... home? Was it a home? Peter was still not sure, he had been so busy catching up with homework and regaining his strength, he had just started asking himself that question.

The teen couldn't believe he had been stupid enough to make the same mistake twice. After Mr. Mitchell's reaction he should have been smart enough to never get caught stealing food again, but that night he had been out for a long shift as Spiderman and what he had at dinner had simply not been enough.

Steve Rogers had surprised him, though. While the man had vowed to keep him fed, Peter would have expected some yelling and maybe a good slap for being up so late or trying to lie. The man had even protected him from Mr. Stark's potential wrath.

Even the next day, there had been no consequences. No yelling. No pain. No lock on the fridge. Just a warm smile and french toast with orange juice, paired with the promise to work on his Art project later and a firm hug.

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"May I be excused?", the kid asked after they had cleared the breakfast table.

"Actually," Steve told him, "We have plans for today. Only if you are up for it, of course."

"Plans?"

Tony rubbed his hands together with delight. "Oh, you are gonna love this!"

"Tony?", Peter asked, sounding a little concerned. "You promised not to turn into a super-villain if we let you have your coffee!"

"Oh hush!", the hero complained. "I'm not the kid here, stop trying to babysit me! Anyways, Steve and I have decided this wonderful Saturday morning would be a great time to meet the other residents of the tower!"

The kid's eyes widened and he stumbled back a little. "You- You don't mean--"

“The Avengers,” Tony confirmed. “Well, Widow, Hawkeye and Wilson, Thor is off planet until next week and Maximoff has run off to a honeymoon with my android son, but I’d rather not think about that,” he explained, a shudder running through him.

“Don’t forget about Buck,” Steve chimed in.

“Ah, yes, right,” Tony agreed, snapping his fingers. “Barnes too, even though he is not an official team member. And Brucie, but you’ve already met him. He’s been asking after you, by the way.”

That snapped the boy out of his open-mouthed staring. “Dr. Banner has been asking about me?!”

“Uh-huh,” Tony hummed. “He’d love to have you help him in the lab again. Apparently those samples were prepared perfectly. Of course that was never a priority and we still want you to take better care of yourself, but...” Tony grinned at the amazed looking teen. “You did a great job, kiddo.”

“Damn Science Nerds,” Steve said, shaking his head sadly. “And I thought I could impress you by letting you throw my shield or something.”

Peter’s eyes widened even more as he slowly turned to the Avenger, staring up at him.

“You’d like that?”, Steve guessed shyly, making Tony internally coo at his adorable husband.

The kid just nodded, once more stunned into silence.

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Bucky was already sparing with Natasha and Clint, when Friday asked all the avengers to meet in the gym. He immediately turned to his guns and knives to prepare for battle, but the friendly ceiling mom TM told him that wasn’t necessary, apparently Stevie and his boy toy just wanted a peaceful team meeting. What really confused him was that the AI even instructed them to put all the weapons down they already had on them.

A minute after the announcement, Sam jogged in, looking just as confused as the other two felt.

“Are you stealing my hoodies again?”, Bucky teased.

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” the falcon replied without missing a beat.

“Sam, it’s missing a sleeve,” the super soldier pointed out.

Before Sam could answer, Dr. Banner entered, giving all of them a friendly greeting. Bucky really liked the odd man. Before Hydra, he might not have been the kind of person to capture his attention, but now the calm and restrained presence was strangely comforting.

All heads turned when the elevator door slid open again, revealing his best friend and the whole tower’s shared sugar daddy. Bucky was about to ask what the meeting was about, when he noticed the small person standing behind them.

The kid had messy brown locks, pale skin, a thin body and was wearing one of Steve’s hoodies, which fell down to his knees, making him look tiny. What really got Bucky though were those eyes. Big, brown, and filled with nervousness and a hint of fear.

“Hey Stark, isn’t it a bit too early for you to be up on a Saturday? What’s going on?”, Clint greeted the billionaire.

“Well...”, Steve said, scratching the back of his neck.

Oh no. Not only Steve, but also Tony looked incredibly nervous but also a little gleeful. Never a good sign. What had those idiots done now?

“Let’s get right to it!”, the billionaire chimed in, cutting off his husband. He took a step to the side, revealing the kid behind him. “Avengers, meet Peter. The newest family member!”

All hell broke loose.

“What the fuck?!”, Sam asked.

“But- But- He’s too young!”, Clint shouted.

“What were you thinking?!”, Natasha hissed, threateningly stepping closer to the confused looking men.

“Steve, you can’t be this stupid!”, Sam told his friend, his dark voice booming through the room.

“We don’t mess with children!”, Clint agreed, seeming to be lost somewhere between angry and disgusted.

Only Dr. Banner didn’t say anything. And Bucky. The Winter Soldier’s eyes were glued on the boy, who had taken a step back towards the elevator, his eyes darting between Tony and Steve and the rest of the Avengers. The hint of fear Bucky had discovered already had seemingly grown into full blown panic.

“Silence!”, Bucky ordered, and the room fell quiet. He didn’t even have to raise his voice, he simply had to use his Winter Soldier tone. All eyes turned to him and Clint, Natasha and Sam were subtly going into fighting stances, trying to figure out if he had snapped or not. Bucky had to admit, making them fear he might attack was mean, but he hadn’t dared to get loud with the frightened child in the room.

He took a step towards the elevator, causing Tony to try to move in front of the boy, but he was stopped by Steve. The billionaire stared at him, until Bucky threw a wink at him, causing the man to relax.

The soldier walked up to the kid but stopped far enough away Tony or Steve could still get between them. From the way the boy’s eyes kept going back to the men, Bucky could tell he trusted them at least to some degree.

“Hello there,” he greeted, giving the kid a small smile. “Hope we didn’t scare you too much.”

The boy flinched back a bit, rapidly shaking his head. “N-No sir, of course not. I’m sorry, I told St-I told Mr. Rogers and Mr. Stark I shouldn’t be here. I can leave. I should leave. I’m sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry for, Peter,” Bucky said gently, then turned to his best friend, his eyes turning to burning ice. “Steve... I really hope for you you didn’t drag this child here against his will.”

“Buck, I-”

“If I may?”, Dr. Banner interrupted them, a strange smirk dancing over his face. “I believe there might be a slight misunderstanding. Tony, why don’t you clarify what you meant by family? I do have a feeling that could clear things up.”

“Thank you!”, Tony exclaimed, looking slightly annoyed. “For heaven’s sake guys, of course I didn’t mean the Avengers family, Petey is like 12!”

“15,” the boy mumbled.

“I know sweetheart, I have all your data, just like everyone else’s,” Tony told him with a wink.

“Creepy,” Clint whispered.

“Tony....”, Steve hissed, nudging his husband in the side.

“Right!”, the man exclaimed. “What I am trying to say is, of course we didn’t recruit a child, when I said family, I meant the Rogers-Stark household.”

Everyone just stared at him blankly, unable to find something to say.

“And just so you know, no yelling around our kid again, or you have to do extra hard training drills for a month or two,” Steve threatened.

“Your kid...?”, Sam repeated slowly.

“Steve, Tony, did you adopt a child?”, Natasha asked, amazement flashing in her eyes.

“We... are working on it,” Steve said, throwing a look at his husband.

“You are fostering him?”, Clint nodded.

“We are working on it,” Tony repeated.

“Oh my god!”, Sam whispered. “Stark, did you kidnap a child?!”

“Of course not! I just-”

“I feel like kidnapping would include my former guardians wanting me back.”

All eyes turned to the boy, who looked less scared and more uncomfortable now.

“Hiya!”, Clint cheered, getting out of the defensive position he had been in for the past few minutes. “Welcome to the family! I can’t wait to be an uncle!”

“Clint you are a goddamn child, you count as a big brother at best,” Sam told him, also relaxing now. “I, however, already have experience as the cool uncle, therefore I am taking that role.”

“Settle down, boys,” Natasha ordered, before turning to Peter, who looked confused by the adults’ behavior. Bucky couldn’t blame him.

“Hello Peter. Welcome,” she simply stated.

“Hi!”, the kid squeaked. “I- uh- I’m a big fan of yours. So is my friend MJ. She’s learning how to break people’s wrists right now.”

“Lovely. Tell her elbows are fun too.”

“I will, Ms. Black Widow!”, the kid nodded enthusiastically.

“Just Natasha is fine,” the redhead smiled. “Or Aunt Nat, if you feel like it,” she added with a wink.

“Are you sure?”, Peter asked, his eyes still wide, but the fear gone after being welcomed by the heroes. “You are an Avenger, after all.”

“And therefore, what I say, goes,” Natasha shrugged. “So yes, I am sure.”

“First names for all of us,” Clint chimed in. “Their family is our family,” the archer explained, nodding at Tony and Steve, who were watching the whole scene with tense shoulders, but approving smiles on their faces.

After the others were done, Bucky stepped up to the kid, going down on one knee so he could peer up at him instead of looming over him. “Steve Rogers has been my best friend forever. We’ve even traveled through time together, I would die for that man without even having to think about it,” he started, searching the boy’s eyes that held far too much pain for such a young age. “But now I am on your side,” Bucky continued. “And no one can stop me.”

“Mr. Barnes?”, Peter asked shyly, looking like he understood but couldn’t believe it.

“It’s just Bucky, kiddo,” the super soldier grinned. “Welcome home. Don’t worry, we all just kinda ended up here. We get it. You’re safe now.”

The boy’s eyes filled with tears. “Thank you.”

Bucky gave him a nod and got up, quickly stepping back now that he was not on eye level anymore. Peter looked around, smiling and nodding at all of them, until his eyes landed on the doctor.

“Hi Dr. Banner,” he greeted with a shy wave. Damn, this kid was cute. Bucky had meant what he had said, he was on Peter’s side now.

“Hi Peter,” the man answered with his own, just as shy and adorable wave. “Let’s upgrade to just Bruce, shall we?”

“Uh- Sure!”

“Okay!”, Tony exclaimed. “That’s cute, but let’s move on. I’d like to add on to what Steve said. ANY inappropriate behavior around the kid will be severely punished. Also, legally, we don’t have him, understood?” He turned to Clint. “Tell Agent if he doesn’t want to be locked out of the tower, he will not mention the boy to anyone.”

“Phil could just break in,” the archer shrugged.

“Have you not been paying attention?”, the billionaire asked. “We can and will send the Winter Soldier after him. Legally, Peter Parker does not exist to you, is that clear?”

The Avengers all gave their approval and the new parents relaxed a little.

“Hey kid, you wanna learn about how the Avengers train?”, Sam asked, using his trademark counselor voice, somewhere between comforting and engaging. Even Bucky relaxed at that tone. Peter nodded enthusiastically and they all started taking turns showing him their weapons and coolest tricks.

Bucky watched the boy carefully. While he was excited about meeting the heroes, the nervous energy never completely left him. The soldier knew now wasn’t the time, but he’d have to ask Steve about the kid later. He didn’t like what had been implied. Did whoever he had been with before really not want Peter back? That seemed impossible, the kid seemed amazing, but Bucky

had seen and lived through enough evil in his far too long life to know some people were just cold and uncaring.

“Bucky?”, Peter asked, his big eyes full of admiration. “Steve said you can do this really cool knife trick. Can you show me?”

“Of course, kid,” the Winter Soldier replied and carefully placed a hand on his shoulder, feeling pride grow in his chest when the boy didn’t flinch. “I’m glad you are home with us now.”

Chapter 13

“Watch out!”

Peter whirled around, catching the Shield in his right hand, his eyes locking with Steve’s.

“Peter!”, the man shrieked, jogging towards him. “Oh my god, I am so sorry! Are you okay? How did you even...?”

The teen dropped the shield like he had been burned, internally cursing himself for being so stupid. Getting hit in the face would have been more fun than his secret getting exposed.

Meeting the Avengers and being easily welcomed by them had been amazing, but also exhausting. Natasha and Sam had offered to show him some cool moves and he had constantly struggled to control his strength and slow down his reflexes. Pretending to be struggling while Bucky and Clint showed him how to break a fall without getting hurt had felt like lying and Peter didn’t like it at all. At least the adults had only asked him about school and his friends, so there hadn’t been any questions he’d rather not answer.

What had really surprised Peter was how understanding they all seemed. Something in the way they looked at him told him he could trust... his new family. The goddamn Avengers had actually called him family. The teen’s mind was made up. He knew what his next step had to be.

“I’m fine!”, Peter quickly reassured the man. “Can I talk to you for a second, though?”

Steve’s face fell and he nodded, placing a hand on his back as he lead him out of the gym and back up to the penthouse. The whole way up, the man threw nervous glances at him, which really didn’t help Peter’s nerves. Once back upstairs, they sat down on the sofa, Steve’s face still twisted up in a frown. Just a week ago it would have put the fear of god into the teen, but right now it was just a sad sight to see.

“Are you sure you are okay?”, the Avenger checked again. “I’m sorry if I scared you. I would never hurt you on purpose, you know that, right?”

“I do,” Peter replied with a sly smile and to his own surprise, he actually meant it.

“So... What do you think of them?”, Steve asked awkwardly.

“Who?”, Peter grinned, “The actual fricking Avengers? They are awesome!”

“Good to hear!”, the man replied, all his worry washed away by the confirmation. “I think it’s pretty clear they feel the same way about you as well.”

That made Peter’s heart stop for a second and Steve seemed to notice. “Petey, what’s wrong?”

“It’s just... What will you tell them? About me?”

“Not a word more than what you are comfortable with,” Steve promised, brushing his hair back a little. Peter couldn’t help but lean into the touch a bit. It had only been a week since the hero had found him under that bridge, but he had longed for safety and comfort for so long, he couldn’t help but take what he could get when it was so freely offered.

“They are your friends. You shouldn’t lie to them,” Peter told him, the words burning on his

tongue. The only layer here was Peter himself.

“We won’t, but it’s your story. They understand that.”

Peter almost didn’t say what he really needed to get out, but he trusted Steve to not break his promises. “Can you- I’m okay with them knowing what happened, but...”

“No details?”, Steve guesses, rubbing his arm gently.

“Yes, and... I’m sorry,” Peter whispered, a sob cutting him off.

“Nothing to be sorry about, darling,” Steve said, pulling him into his side. The boy just closed his eyes and pressed his nose into the warm chest for a moment. Steve and Tony were both getting really good at dealing with his bullshit.

“Can we not mention what I did? When I took the food from the lab? I don’t want them to think I’m a thief. I mean, I am, but... I want them to get to know me first.”

“Oh Peter,” Steve sighed, his grip around the teen tightening. “Whatever makes you feel most comfortable, but just for the record, you are not a thief. You know why Tony got so upset, right?”

“He thought I stole tech?”, Peter sniffed.

“Exactly!”, Steve said. “My dumbass husband, and don’t tell him I call him that, put a stranger in a lab filled with dangerous and expensive tech with full access to all of SI’s data bases. Happy almost murdered him for that! You could have betrayed us, but you didn’t and I’m so damn proud of you.”

“For not stealing?”, Peter asked, unimpressed.

“No,” Steve said darkly, placing his big palms on the boy’s cheeks looking him directly in the eyes. “For surviving. I’m so damn glad you took what you needed, that something from us supported you even before we took you in. You managed to survive and I’m so proud of you for making it here. To our home. To safety.”

Peter nodded, his eyes filling up with tears against his will. Steve’s hands dropped down to his shoulder’s pulling him in for another hug.

“What is it you wanted to talk about?”, the man asked after a few minutes, making Peter tense up.

“Oh, right... Well, I have a request...”

“Go ahead.”

“Can I bring Ned here? Not the penthouse of course! Just- Just the cafeteria or something? Maybe I could introduce you to him?”, Peter rambled, going faster with every word that passed his lips.

“Slow down, Pete!”, Steve chuckled. “Of course you are bringing him up here, this is your home now. We just have to talk to Tony and Happy about some security stuff, but we are happy to have your friends over.”

“Thank you. I’m not sure he would have believed me I’m actually living here without proof.”

Steve pulled back in surprise. “He doesn’t know?”

“He still thinks I live with the Mitchels,” Peter admitted. “I just... I wanted to make sure...” He

didn't know how to put it into words. "I wanted to be sure first. About you. And this place."

Now it was the Avenger who looked like he was about to cry. "And you are now?"

Peter nodded and was pulled back into another hug. "We are sure about you too," Steve whispered.

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Tony walked over to the elevator when the doors opened. "Hey, what-", he froze when he saw his husband's tears. "Steve? What happened? Is Peter okay?", he checked, worry clenching his heart.

"Tony," Steve whispered, pulling him into his chest.

"Honey? You are scaring me," Tony told him, not sure how to react.

"Sorry, sorry," Steve muttered, pressing a few kisses to his hair. "Everything is okay. I just had an emotional talk with Petey."

"Emotional? Is he okay?", Tony checked once more, still confused by his husband's behavior. This wasn't like him.

"He's fine. I think he's really beginning to trust us."

"Yeah?", Tony asked, finally relaxing into the embrace.

"Hey lovebirds, what's up with the cuddling?", Clint giggled from across the room and was immediately tackled by Bucky, who had used his moment of distraction to break through his defense.

"We will have to talk to them," Steve groaned as he looked over to their friends.

"Yup," Tony agreed. "Did Peter say anything about that?"

"No detail, but he's okay with them knowing the main story."

Tony nodded, that was reasonable. "Anything specific?"

"Don't mention he took food from your lab. He's still embarrassed about that."

Huh. He hadn't been planning on bringing that up anyways. "But..."

"Yeah, I know," Steve sighed. "I told him how we feel about that, but I think he's just not used to kindness yet."

"He will be," Tony hissed, only calming down when his husband gently rubbed his shoulder. The two men turned around and walked a few steps towards their friends, who immediately stopped sparing and chatting in order to stare at them.

"Who hurt that child?", Bucky asked darkly when they stopped in front of them.

"Foster family."

Clint and Bruce both winced, the latter turning a bit green for a second. Both of them had suffered at the hands of their fathers, and his time at the circus had not been the most pleasing for the archer.

Tony's eyes wandered to Natasha and Bucky. Both had been forced into abusive situations without escape. Steve and Sam may have had a pretty normal upbringing, but they were just as protective of the innocent as everyone else in the room.

"Give me the full names and address," Bucky growled.

"I can't do that," Tony said sternly.

"Oh, you need help finding it out? Just give me a few minutes and I--"

"No," Tony cut Natasha off. "We can't hurt them."

He lifted a hand to stop the wave of angry responses. "Yet. As far as the state is concerned, we believe Peter Parker is with his aunt right now. He's my intern and nothing more, until we've got a way to keep him here legally."

The Avengers didn't seem happy, but they nodded. Tony's influence and money could take them far, but they couldn't risk losing the kid for premature revenge.

"His aunt?", Sam asked confused. "Didn't you say he was in the foster care system?"

Steve stepped forward and told them the whole story. How they had met Peter, that it had become obvious something was going on, about finding out he was homeless and learning the whole story. He left out the details, just mentioned all of the potential triggers and underlying issues they had discovered so far. By the end of his report, their friends were trembling with anger and Nat's eyes kept darting to the weapon's room.

"You said you sent him home," Bruce whispered to himself. "If he was homeless... Tony, did we throw an injured child out on the streets?!"

"He stayed with his best friend. Since then he has spent every night here," Tony reassured his science bro.

"So he has been with you two for a week?", Bruce chuckled once his shock was gone. "You are so predictable."

"What do you mean?", Tony wondered.

"That day you told me he wasn't 'you kid', I'm guessing that has changed since then?"

"I... Well...?", Tony stuttered, turning to his husband. "Babe, I know you had diplomatic training at Shield. You handle this."

"Uh... He's not legally ours," Steve started shyly.

"Yet," Tony added quickly.

"You better hurry or one of us will adopt him instead," Bucky threatened.

"Right," Steve agreed. "I don't think I have to explain to everyone here how traumatic everything that happened to him was. In the beginning he didn't even want to stay here, so... It's up to him. We can't assume any titles."

"So you'll just house him, feed him, clothe him, spend time with him, be his shoulder to cry on and guide him through life?", Sam chuckled. "But he's totally not your kid?"

“If you put it that way...”, Steve sighed. “I guess he’s out kid, but he will need time so we are his...?” He looked at Tony like he could answer that question.

“His... guardians,” Tony decided, not really liking the formal title.

“Right,” Bucky grinned, earning him a chuckle from Sam and an angry glare from Tony.

“And you are ready for that?”, Sam asked. “Considering what you have told us, the tower is the safest place for him, but what about long term? As you said, the boy is clearly traumatized. He will need more than a bed and a meal. Are you willing to REALLY take care of him?”

“Yes,” Steve and Tony said in unison, determination filling their voices, making the Avengers nod in agreement. Apparently their friends had decided to trust him with their new friend’s body, heart and growing mind.

“Do you have more questions?”, Steve asked. The Avengers looked at each other and shrugged.

“Good,” the Captain sighed. “Please excuse us, Tony and I have some things to discuss.”

“Uh-oh! Someone’s in trouble!”, Clint cheered.

“He’s not,” Steve told the archer, wrapping an arm around Tony’s shoulders. “We just...” Suddenly the man got a little bit pale and he stared down at his husband with wide eyes. “I guess we have to discuss... parenting?”

Suddenly Tony understood Steve’s panic. “What the fuck...”

Chapter 14

“Ned...? Can we talk?”

The boy stopped in his tracks. Peter sounded far too serious for a Monday morning. “Of course. Are you okay?”

“Yes,” his best friend replied and for the first time in many months, Ned actually believed him, even though Peter seemed extremely nervous. “Are you free today after school? I want to show you something.”

Ned scratched the back of his head. “But Peter, we have that Math homework we need to work on...”

“We can do it there!”, Peter said, rapidly nodding his head. This seemed to be extremely important to him. Somehow Ned sensed that this had to do with the huge secret thing Peter wouldn’t talk about.

“Alright then,” he agreed finally and followed his friend to class.

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“Hey losers! What’s up?”

“Far too much lately,” Peter groaned, letting his head fall down on the desk.

“Awww...”, MJ cooed sarcastically, letting her fingers run through his hair. Ned rolled his eyes at the blush on Peter’s face. His best friend was being so obvious, and yet those two were still dancing around each other. It was painful to watch. If only MJ wasn’t so proud, she could just admit she liked Peter back and release Ned from his suffering.

“You look pathetic,” the girl declared. “I’m gonna draw you.”

“Cool. Gonna hang it on my wall,” Peter muttered.

“Won’t your guardians take it down?”, MJ frowned.

Peter tensed and then relaxed. “Trust me, it’s fine.”

“Okay,” the girl shrugged. “Do you want to come over after school so I can finish it?”

Peter’s head snapped up at that. “I- I want to say yes, I really do, but- but-”, he threw a desperate look at Ned.

“We have plans,” Ned told her, feeling a bit sad Peter couldn’t take this opportunity.

“What, no girls allowed?”, MJ joked, making Peter go even paler.

“No! It’s not like that at all!”, the nervous teen panicked, his face even redder now. “We- Uh- Maybe you can come over another time?”

MJ, who had obviously just been joking about being upset, frowned at that. “Come over? Is that a good idea? I thought your foster family didn’t allow that?”

“I-”, Peter was cut off by the bell and seemed very relieved he didn’t have to answer that question. Something told Ned he’d have a very interesting afternoon.

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“Wait, this way,” Peter said when Ned turned to the tube station. The confused boy turned around and spotted a black car with tinted windows and a grim looking man in a suit waiting in front of it.

“Uh... Peter? Are you sure this is a good idea?”, Ned mumbled as he was dragged towards the guy.

“Relax. That’s just Mr. Hogan,” his friend tried to reassure him, but it didn’t work at all. Wasn’t Mr. Hogan the scary security guy Peter had mentioned?

“Get in,” The man huffed when they reached the car.

Ned and Peter climbed into the back, throwing their bags in the space between them.

“You good, kid?”, Mr. Hogan asked, mustering Peter in the review mirror.

“Yes, just a bit nervous,” Peter admitted. Ned relaxed a bit when he noticed that his friend didn’t seem afraid. Not 100% comfortable, but not afraid.

“Uh... Are we being kidnapped,” Ned whispered when they moved further away from either of their homes.

Suddenly the car pulled over and Mr. Hogan turned around to stare at him. “Peter Parker’s legal status is none of your concerns. We know everything about you, Ned Leeds, you are better off not asking too many questions.”

Ned froze and nodded slowly, causing the man to restart the car.

“Ignore him,” Peter told him with an eye roll. “I trust you not to call the cops.”

“The cops?!”, Ned shrieked, wondering if he could jump out of the moving car. “Peter, where are we going?!”,

“Stark Tower,” Mr. Hogan answered, demonstrating he was clearly listening in.

“What?!”, Ned whispered, feeling confused and excited all at once. Stark Tower was the coolest place in the world, but the whole situation was freaking him out. “You are taking me to your internship? Is that allowed?”

“Internship?”, the man in the front chuckled. “That’s one way to phrase it.”

“Happy!”, Peter whined. “Be nice!” Then he turned back to Ned. “We are going up to the penthouse actually.”

“Tony Stark’s penthouse?!”, Ned shrieked, not even caring about the embarrassing voice crack.

“Technically, Steve owns the penthouse,” Mr. Hogan chimed in.

“Really?”, Peter asked. “How come?”

“Well... Once upon a time, Iron Man himself said: ‘I bet you my penthouse I can eat this entire cheeseburger in one bite.’ The idiot almost choked to death.”

“Huh,” Pete nodded. “That does sound like Tony.”

Ned felt like he had ended up in a parallel universe or something. Peter was on first name basis with Tony fucking Stark??? He was taking him to the man’s home? And the head of security was driving them? He had so many questions, but he had the feeling his friend would want to answer those in private, so he just leaned against the window and tried to calm his rapidly beating heart.

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Ned was led right through the truly impressive lobby of Stark Tower to the private elevators. He wanted to stop and marvel at the huge screens and breathtaking architecture, but Peter begged him to just hurry up and promised they could take some time for that next time.

Next time? Apparently Peter was suddenly very familiar with the building and confident they’d be there a lot. No complaints from Ned, this was the coolest thing that had ever happened to him, but he was still confused.

The elevator doors slid shut behind them and Ned started looking around for buttons. “How do we....?”

“Don’t worry, I will take care of it,” a robotic voice announced. “Welcome, Ned Leeds.”

“Oh hi!”, Ned grinned, barely able to not jump up and down in excitement. That was probably a bad idea in an elevator. “You must be Friday! Peter told me all about you!”

“Awe... You talk about me, Petey?”, the AI cooed.

“Of course,” Peter answered smoothly. “You are my favorite here.”

“I’ll have to tell the boss,” Friday replied.

“Better not,” Peter giggled. “I’ll never live it down.”

Ned just stared at the boy until he noticed. “What?”

“You never said you were besties with Tony Stark’s AI. Peter, what’s going on with you?”

“Look I- I trust you, you know that, right?”

“I trust you too,” Ned replied without missing a beat.

“Yeah, I know,” his friend told him with a soft smile. “Look, I am aware you’d never betray me, but Tony wants me to make sure anyways.”

“Okay? Is this about you-know-who?”, Ned guessed, referring to Peter’s alter ego.

His friend’s eyes widened and he quickly shook his head. “No. No, I just need to- Friday? Could you please deliver the message?”

“Mr. Stark would like to inform you, Mr. Leeds, that you are about to learn information that could hurt Mr. Parker, Mr. Stark and Captain Rogers, among several other people. By learning this information and not sharing it with law enforcement, you are incriminating yourself. Mr. Stark wants you to be fully aware of that before you agree to go further.”

Ned’s heart sped up. Law enforcement? What had Peter gotten himself into?

“Agreed,” he simply answered.

“Furthermore, Mr. Stark would like you to know that should you forward any information, you can, and I am quoting here ‘kiss your future goodbye, because he will bring the whole might of Stark Industries and the Avengers down on you’.”

Now Ned was getting pissed off. Iron Man might be his hero, but he had been by Peter’s side for about ten years now. How dare the billionaire even imply he would ever betray his best friend?! Stark had known Peter for little more than a month. And last time Ned had seen the man, he had managed to get Peter injured and upset.

“Tell Stark,” Ned gritted out, “I’m giving the same warning back. I might just be some kid, but I will find a way to take him down. I know about his former opponents. None of them had proper motivation. If he hurts Peter or puts him in danger, I will end him.”

“Very well, Mr. Leeds,” Friday answered, almost sounding approving. Ned hadn’t known AI’s could do that.

“Thanks, that’s very kind of you. Oh, and you can just call me Ned,” The boy answered, smiling up at the ceiling, hoping he was looking at one of the cameras.

“Oh!”, the AI said happily. “You young people are so polite!”

“Ned...”, Peter whispered. Only now he realized his best friend hadn’t commented on anything that had been said. “You have to take that back! What if-”

“No,” Ned cut him off, his eyes narrowing. “Enough with the bullshit. Whatever is going on, I’ve got you.”

Before either of them could say more, the elevator doors slid open and Ned’s breathing stopped for a moment. He might be trying to play the role of the tough guy right now, but this was Tony fucking Stark’s penthouse and it was amazing.

There was a wide living area, illuminated by the sunlight falling in through the wall made of windows. The couches looked expensive, yet comfortable. The place looked like a picture from a magazine, but what really surprised him was how lived in it looked. There was an open book on the coffee table, a jacket hanging over the back of one of the armchairs, an empty coffee cup on the dining table and a blanket had been messily thrown on the couch.

Ned could have stood there and looked around for hours, but Peter was moving towards the stairs, so he followed. They walked down a hallway towards a plain looking door.

The room Peter showed him was just as fancy as the rest of the tower, but simple. There was a bed, a desk with a chair, a closet, a few shelves and a sofa with a coffee table. Ned didn’t think much of it, until he noticed the smaller details. The hoodie on the bed was the one he had seen Peter wear a few days ago. The phone charger plugged in next to the nightstand was Peter’s as well. So was the old backpack and the schoolbooks on the desk.

“This is your room,” Ned realized. “Peter, how far was I off with that kidnapping joke?”

“Well...”, Peter blushed and scratched the back off his neck, not meeting Ned’s eyes. “I am here willingly.”

“Okay...? So you are not with the Mitchels anymore? For how long?”

“I have lived here for a week,” Peter sighed, letting himself fall down on the sofa. “But I have not been with my foster family for five months.”

Horried Ned listened as Peter told him how he had been beaten and starved, right under Ned’s nose. How he had run away and become homeless. How Ned’s own stupid program and infiltration of the school’s system had made that even possible in the first place. How his best friend had been freezing and starving on the streets without anyone reaching out. By the end, the teen was trembling, but once he had started, the words just kept spilling out.

“You were homeless... God, Peter, I am so sorry.”

His friend’s head shot up. “You have nothing to be sorry about.”

“I knew something was wrong!”, Ned admitted. “I thought you were just dealing with May’s death, not any of this! I should have helped you!”

“You did enough,” Peter told him, his hand’s still shaking. “You didn’t even know how much I needed it, but you gave me so much anyways. Food, a shower, a place to stay...”

Ned’s eyes fell on the neatly made bed and his stomach turned. “God... I made you sleep on the floor. You didn’t even have a bed and I made you sleep on the floor.”

“You didn’t know,” Peter sniffed. “No one knew.”

“Why?”, Ned asked, staring ahead, trying to comprehend what he had just learned.

“I was scared someone would call CPS. The Michels are clever, they made it look like I was a bad kid.”

Ned rolled his eyes at that. No one should be dumb enough to believe that. “Why didn’t you tell me though?”, he couldn’t help but ask.

“You were the only thing from before,” Peter whispered. From before she died. I just wanted to keep one thing like it was.”

Finally the dam broke and tears started running down his friend’s face as violent sobs shook his still too thin body. It was a heartbreaking sight, but somehow Ned sensed the boy had waited for this moment for months. For a chance to finally let go. To be vulnerable and free, not hiding behind lies anymore.

“One last thing,” Ned said as he pulled his friend against his chest. Peter whimpered and Ned shushed him gently. “You are sure you are safe now? With Mr. Rogers and Mr. Stark?”

Peter nodded against his shoulder where a wet spot was quickly forming. Ned let out a relieved breath. “Okay. Okay, Peter, let go. I’ve got you.”

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“Peter?”

Holy shit. That was actually Tony Stark knocking on the door.

“Pete, I need to know you are okay. If you don’t answer, I will open the door.”

“Come in!”, Ned called as loudly as he dared, trying not to wake the boy sleeping in his arms.

“Hey, what... oh,” Iron Man himself started but stopped himself when he saw the two teenagers on the couch.

“So... You are the kid threatening to burn my empire to the ground?”, he asked more quietly, making Ned feel a bit embarrassed by his earlier speech.

“Well... Peter says you have really helped him, so sorry about that, sir.” he looked down at his best friend’s face with the pale skin and too prominent cheekbones. “But if I find a single bruise, I will find a way,” Ned added darkly.

“I like you. You should stay for dinner,” the man chuckled.

“Thank you, Mr. Stark.”

“Good. I’ll let Steve know.”

“Ned? What...?” The body resting against Ned suddenly began to stir.

“Shh... Rest, Petey,” Ned whispered and pressed a kiss to his friend’s forehead.

“Love you, Ned,” Peter mumbled and nuzzled his face into his shoulder.

“Love you too, buddy,” Ned chuckled.

“I’ll just...”, Mr. Stark said awkwardly, gesturing to the hallway and closed the door behind him. Ned had to roll his eyes at the man’s obvious discomfort. If he wanted to keep Peter, he’d have to get used to Ned as well.

He reached out for his bag to get started on homework while Peter slept. Ned really tried to concentrate, but it was difficult. He had just talked to Tony Stark! The second he didn’t have to look out for his best friend anymore, he went right back to his old fanboy ways.

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After half an hour or so, Peter woke up and Ned let him copy the part of the homework he had already finished before they both completed the rest. Usually Peter was too honest to copy any work, but they both agreed today he deserved a break.

Only then they noticed they hadn’t even had lunch yet, even though they had been at Stark Tower for over two hours.

“I’ll show you the food court! It’s really cool, and maybe we’ll meet some of the interns!”, Peter said cheerfully, dragging him to the elevator. Ned still couldn’t believe how crazy his friend’s life had become within the matter of a few weeks.

When he tried to follow Peter into the elevator, he was suddenly pulled back by his backpack. Ned shrieked and looked up to find cold blue eyes staring down at him.

Now, don’t get him wrong, Ned had always been on Bucky Barnes’ side. After he had been brought back to the USA, there had been a big debate whether or not he was to blame for his actions. Both Ned and Peter believed he was the victim, not the villain of his story and besides, hating the Winter Soldier was such a boomer opinion anyways.

And yet, Ned felt absolutely terrified at that moment. Then again, he would have been terrified by any six feet tall super soldier angrily staring down at him, with or without assassin background.

“Peter! Help!”, Ned squeaked, feeling like he was asking an owner to call back their large dog.

“Uh...? Mr. Barnes? Could you please let my friend go?”, Peter said, sounding confused but not worried, which relaxed Ned a little.

The Winter soldier let go of his backpack, but was still staring down at him. “That book...”

“Oh!”, Ned realized, pulling out his copy of ‘Lord of the Rings – The Fellowship of the Ring’ from the side pocket of his bag. “What about it, sir?”

“I recognize that name...”, the man said, his vibranium finger tapping the cover.

“Tolkien?”, Ned asked, his legs still feeling like jelly.

“Yeah,” the man grumbled in his dark, lazy tone. “Wrote ‘the Hobbit’, right? I- I remember that book. From- from before.”

“This is the sequel,” Ned explained.

“There is a sequel?!”, the man said loudly, but suddenly appearing a lot less threatening.

“It has three parts, actually...”, Peter chimed in.

“Three more books?! And no one told me?! I’m gonna kill Stevie! He knows that’s my favorite book! I’ll have to order the sequels immediately!”, the suddenly grinning man rambled. Now he seemed more like a puppy to Ned.

“Would you like to borrow my copy, Mr. Barnes?”, Ned offered. The Winter Soldier had always been one of his favorite heroes, even though he was not an official Avenger and seeing him like this was simply touching.

“Are you sure, kid? And please, just call me Bucky.”

“I’ve read it a few times before,” Ned shrugged.

“Wow, thanks!”, the former assassin cheered as he took the book Ned was offering. “You’re my favorite kid now!”

“Hey!”, Peter complained, but there was no real heat behind it and he was grinning at both of them.

“Sorry, Petey, you’re cool too” Bucky chuckled and ruffled Peter’s hair, making the boy turn bright red. Ned completely understood. According to Peter, he had met the Avengers just two days ago.

“Have you seen how amazing this cover is?!”, Bucky added, pointing at the hand-drawn picture of the Hobbit house with a dragon made out of smoke flying over Bilbo Baggins’ birthday party in the background.

“Yeah, our friend MJ gave it to Ned last Christmas,” Peter explained.

“Wow...”, Bucky breathed out. “I promise I will take good care of it,” he told Ned before turning back to Peter. “Your friends are so much cooler than mine!”

Right on cue, Steve Rogers, Captain fucking America, busted through a door next to the elevator. Ned’s brain was going to explode.

The panting man's eyes darted between them. "Friday informed me you might murder the children?"

"Oh, they are fine," Bucky said dismissively. "You however, are in trouble!" He held the book up high, glaring at the other super soldier. "How come you didn't tell me there was a sequel to 'The Hobbit'?"

"Huh? Oh yeah, I think I watched the movies with Tony," Captain Roger's shrugged.

"There are movies?!", Bucky shrieked.

"Yeah?", Mr. Rogers said, seemingly not understanding what was going on. "Can we circle back a bit? You are not murdering people?"

"I think he's starting a book club," Peter explained.

"Oh, that's ni-"

"You are not invited!", Bucky cut Mr. Rogers off, crossing his arms. "And we are keeping that kid," he added, pointing at Ned.

"Oh, hello. Nice to meet you again, Ned," Captain America smiled, offering him his hand.

"I- It's nice to meet you too, sir," Ned stuttered, trying to wrap his mind around being addressed by the Steve Rogers.

"Please just call me Steve," the man said cheerfully. "What are you guys up to anyways?"

"We just finished homework and now we are on our way to the food court," Peter explained.

"Food court?", Steve repeated. "Did you not have lunch yet?", he asked, sounding far more serious than before.

"No, sorry," Peter said, suddenly sounding small and afraid. Ned's eyes snapped to his friend's new guardian, carefully analyzing his reaction. He might have promised to protect Peter, but obviously he couldn't do so physically.

"Not a problem, go get whatever you want for your friend and yourself," Steve answered softly, no anger, only concern in his eyes. "But please don't skip meals for homework, you know we'll help you if you are struggling."

"Wasn't because of that, I fell asleep," Peter mumbled.

Steve threw a bright smile at Ned. "Yeah, Tony mentioned that."

Ned suddenly felt his face grow hot as he realized Iron Man and Captain America were talking about them cuddling.

"Why were you so tired today? You are not getting sick, right?", Steve asked, holding a hand to Peter's forehead.

"No, I just..." The teen looked away, biting his lip. "I- I told Ned. About everything."

"Oh...", Steve whispered, and to Ned's surprise, he pulled Peter in for a hug. "I'm proud of you, sweetheart," he said so quietly, Ned almost didn't catch it. After a few seconds he stepped back, a warm smile still fixed on his face. "I'll see you at dinner then. Remember what Happy said about

Ned not losing his badge.”

“Yes, Steve,” Peter smiled back and Ned started to understand why his friend had started to be hopeful again. Both Mr. Stark and Steve seemed to actually care for him. Ned grinned to himself as he followed Peter into the elevator.

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The food court was just as cool as Peter said, but so was everything else at Stark Tower. They didn’t see any of the interns, so they just ate on their own, Ned asking Peter a million questions about the Avengers and the tower.

After they finished, they went back to Peter’s room to watch YouTube until Steve called them down for dinner. Ned noticed Peter going tense, but decided not to comment on it. Throughout the afternoon, his friend had reacted in similar manner to certain situations or topics. After learning about what his foster family had done, Ned was not surprised.

They went downstairs, where both of Peter’s new guardians were already sitting at the dining table. Ned couldn’t believe who he was going to have dinner with. Peter had told him he had to stop fanboying at some point, but this was his first time at Stark Tower, so Ned felt like his behavior was very reasonable.

“Have a seat, Ned,” Steve told him with a smile, gesturing across from him.

“Thank you, Steve,” Ned replied, sitting down next to Peter.

“Oh, we are doing first names now?”, Mr. Stark asked.

“Yes. I’ve decided we are going to be the cool par- the cool guardians,” the blond explained.

“Pff, I’m always the cool one,” Mr. Stark huffed in a very uncool way.

“Really? ‘Cause Bucky is forming a book club without us. Do you really want him to be cooler than us?”

The billionaire pouted. “Fine! Ted can call me Tony.”

“Very mature,” Steve huffed. “At least you are not spitting death threats anymore.”

“They didn’t even impress him!”, Tony pointed out.

Suddenly both men turned to Ned. “Look, it might not be legal, but we-”

“I get it,” Ned interrupted. “I don’t care as long as Peter is safe. I won’t tell anyone. My parents think we are at MJ’s.”

“Great, now we are kidnapping two teenagers,” the Captain groaned, burying his face in his hands.

Dinner with the superheroes was strangely normal. While Steve seemed more comfortable and was asking them questions about their day at school, Tony quickly joined in the second they started talking about their robotics class. He even asked Ned about what he had been working on. Holy crap, Tony Stark had asked Ned about his project!

It got a bit awkward when the engineer brought the fact he had hacked the school system, but the tension quickly went away when the man made clear he didn’t care about the fact Ned had broken the law, but just wanted to talk about the mechanics of it.

The boy almost spit out his food when Tony told him he should swing by his lab next time he came over. Apparently he had managed to somehow impress Tony Stark. Wow. Steve was definitely getting his wish, the two were officially the coolest parents Peter could find, even though all three were dancing around the official title.

After dinner Mr. Happy drove him home and Ned understood how difficult it must have been for Peter to keep so many secrets. He wanted nothing more than to tell his mom about the amazing day he had had.

While he couldn't give her the details, at least Ned could text MJ, reassuring her that Peter would be fine. She always acted like she didn't care, but Ned knew she had been just as worried as him.

Ned fell asleep with a thousand memories and thoughts spinning in his mind, but, for the first time since May had passed, positive that his best friend was safe and happy.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Peter swung in through the open window, giggling to himself. The patrol had been amazing. He had stopped three muggings, had saved an old woman from getting hit by a car and had shown a little boy the way back to his parents after getting lost in a crowd. The second robber had lightly cut his shoulder with a knife, but thanks to all the food he was getting lately, the wound had healed within a minute.

Talking about food... Peter reached under his bed to pull out one of the special protein bars he had found in the Avengers' kitchen. According to the label, they were meant to only be consumed by super soldiers and north gods, but apparently they also worked on him. No more waking up from hunger in the middle of the night.

It was almost one am, but Peter still didn't feel exhausted. Tired and ready for sleep, sure, but the bone crushing exhaustion that had built up for over a year now was slowly beginning to lift.

Peter still had a long way to go. Just two days ago his mind had gone in overdrive and he had snapped at MJ for asking him about homework. He had apologized the next day, but it still showed how... fragile he was. Like he was just one bad thing away from breaking down. Thanks to his new... guardians... bad things had stayed away from him for a while, but it was still not a good place to be, mentally.

Anyways, he was getting better. For the first time in forever, he only had to worry about finishing his homework and processing all the crazy things that were going on in his life, not where his next meal was gonna come from or how he was going to survive winter.

Peter wrapped himself up in his sheets and closed his eyes, not afraid of what he would find when he opened them again.

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Peter was relaxing in one of the armchairs, rereading the entire LotR series so he could keep up with Bucky's rambling, when the elevator door opened. The only people with access to the penthouse were Tony, Steve, Peter and, if they asked Friday politely, the Avengers, so this didn't concern Peter at all. What alarmed him, however, was the noise of high-heels hitting the wooden floor.

Peter's head snapped up and his eyes settled on a tall woman with long, shiny ginger hair, red lipstick and freckled skin, wearing a light blue blouse paired with a gray skirt. His jaw dropped open as her eyes narrowed and she pinned him with steel blue eyes.

"P-Pepper Potts!", Peter exclaimed, almost falling over when he jumped to his feet.

"And you are?", the CEO asked sharply.

"Peter. Peter Parker, Ma'am."

She crossed her arms, her perfectly groomed fingernails flashing in the afternoon sun falling in through the windows. "I feel like I have heard that name before..."

“Uh... I used to work in the intern lap?”, Peter offered, not sure what he was supposed to do.

“Intern?”, she questioned sharply. “Then what on earth do you think you are doing here?”

“I live here,” Peter explained, feeling like he was being scolded by a teacher.

“What do you mean?”

“My bedroom is up there?”, he explained, pointing towards the stairs.

“Excuse me?!”

Peter was beginning to feel very uneasy. While he felt no danger coming from her, this was still Pepper Potts, and that in itself was intimidating. “Let me just...” He backed up to the stairs, his eyes still fixed on her. “Tony?!”

“What?”

“I need help!”

The sound of feet hitting the hallway floor was followed by Tony reaching the top of the stairs, pausing for a second. “Petey? Are you okay?”

“Y-Yeah, just...”, Peter gestured towards the room, causing Tony to walk down half of the steps before freezing when his eyes fell on Ms. Potts.

“Ah. Shit,” he said in a matter of fact voice.

“Tony? Why do you have this minor in your home? Who-”, suddenly the CEO froze, her eyes darting between Peter and Tony. “Oh. Oh god. Tony! Why didn’t you tell me?! You know I need to prepare in case the press-”

“Press? No, bad idea, no press!”, Tony interrupted her as he came down the rest of the stairs to stand next to Peter, who was feeling more and more uneasy.

“What if the mother calls them?”, Ms. Potts asked, her eyes still going between the engineer and his confused ward.

“Not gonna be a problem,” Peter pointed out. “My whole family is dead.”

“Kid!”, Tony exclaimed, gripping his shoulder. “Damn, you are killing me.”

“Oh,” Ms. Potts said, her shoulder slumping down. “I’m sorry to hear that.” She turned to Tony. “How did you meet her?”

“Oh, I never knew the boy’s mother.”

“What? But...”

Suddenly the grip on Peter’s shoulder tightened as Tony let out a sharp gasp. “Pepper! God! He’s not my...” The engineer looked down at Peter and trailed off. “We are not related,” he said awkwardly.

“Then what is he doing here?”, Ms. Potts asked, looking even more confused than before.

“Peter lives here...?”, Tony said, giving Peter the impression that perhaps he also felt like he was

being scolded.

“Tony... Did you and Steve adopt without telling me?”, the CEO asked, a look of wonder taking over her face.

“Not exactly... Fri, activate the ‘get out of jail free card’ protocol.”

“Yes, boss. All records of Ms. Potts’ visit here have been deleted.”

“You promised me we wouldn’t need that protocol anymore!”

“Mr. Stark? Do you wish to be left alone?”, Peter whispered, already trying to move to the stairs and away from the fight.

Tony whirled around, ignoring Ms. Potts for the moment. “Peter, I’m sorry, I should have checked in with you. You can leave if you want to, but if you are up to it, I’d love for you to meet my friend Pepper. She is my CEO and-”

“I know who Pepper Potts is,” Peter snorted. “She’s an icon.”

Ms. Potts chuckled at that. “Oh, I like him! But Tony... I’m pretty sure you will have to put this child back where you found them.”

“That’s not gonna happen,” Peter said confidently, looking up at Tony. “You promised.”

“Yes darling,” The man smiled, wrapping an arm around him. “You are staying right here.” Then he pulled him closer and directed his attention back at his CEO. “Look, Pep, I won’t give you the incriminating details. All you need to know is that I’m working on it. Petey has nowhere else to go. Calling CPS and trying to make it official at this stage, would put him in danger.”

“Danger?”, Ms. Potts repeated, her eyes looking into Peter’s.

“You- You are not going to tell on us, right Ma’am?”, he asked, feeling himself stepping back and behind Tony without really meaning to.

Ms. Potts mustered Tony, who was now holding his hand tightly, telling him it was going to be okay in a soft voice. “No Peter, of course not. Why don’t we all sit down and talk?”

They sat down in the living room and Tony answered the many questions Ms. Potts asked, while Peter was just holding onto the man’s arm.

How long had Peter been there? - Almost three weeks.

Was there anyone looking for him? - Technically CPS, but not very actively.

How had they met? - High school program.

“Technically, it was you, Ms. Potts,” Peter added shyly.

“What do you mean?”, Tony asked.

“Don’t you remember?”, Peter smiled. “I was told Ms. Potts came up with the contest. Without her I wouldn’t be here. I’d still-”

He was cut off by Tony pulling him into a firm hug. “Thanks, Pep,” the man said after kissing his hair and making Peter turn bright red.

“You changed,” the CEO simply stated. “And it has been just three weeks?”

“Had a good reason to,” Tony shrugged. “I mean, look at him!”, he exclaimed, poking Peter’s cheek.

“Child abuse!”, Peter laughed swatting at his hand.

After that, their conversation became more relaxed. Ms. Potts, or Pepper, like she insisted, asked him about school, his friends and what it had been like to meet the Avengers.

“Not even Steve is as scary as he seems,” Peter grinned when he was done explaining how he had learned all of the Avengers’ coolest tricks already.

“Scary?”, Pepper wondered. “I thought most people just see him as a puppy!”

“Couldn’t fight or run from him,” Peter shrugged and took another one of the cookies Tony had placed on the table. He felt Tony’s arm around him and Pepper’s heavy gaze, but he decided to ignore both.

“I see,” the CEO said stiffly.

They chatted a bit longer, until Pepper announced she had to go or she’d be late for a meeting.

“Now,” she said, looking at Peter, “Should you need anything, and I mean ANYTHING, give me a call. I can’t just leave you alone with this heathen,” she added gesturing to Tony.

Peter felt himself go red, but he still forced himself to ask what he had been trying to get out for the past thirty minutes. “Actually... May I have an autograph? Please?”

“What?!”, Tony shrieked, his voice almost cracking. “You didn’t even ask me for one! I am Iron Man!”

“More like Iron Baby,” Pepper snorted.

“My friend’s birthday is on Tuesday and Ned and I were gonna take her out for ice cream, I thought I could give it to her then? You are her idol,” Peter explained, his heart speeding up a little.

“MJ? Your little girlfriend?”, Tony asked, making Peter get even more nervous. “Mr. Stark! I- I don’t- I mean- We are not-!”

“Tony, be nice! Or do you want me to tell him about your little obsession with Captain America?”, Pepper teased.

“Well, I ended up marrying the guy, so you’d just be proving my point!”, Tony shot back.

“You know what?”, Pepper told Peter, “Have Friday text me the address and time, and I’ll swing by to give it to her in person.”

“Really?!”, Peter gasped.

Pepper gave him a smirk and a wink. “Everything for my favorite Stark.”

Heeeeyyyy. So the semester just started and I have been pretty damn sick the past week, sorry for posting less. My apologies if the story is a little disorganized at the moment, I kinda made this chapter up as I went. However, I do have more scenes and actually plot planned out, I'll get to that soon!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Why so excited, bud?”

Peter whirled around to look at Steve, who was watching him over the rim of his coffee mug.

“Nothing!”

“Hmm... So this has nothing to do with MJ?”

“W-What about MJ?”, Peter asked, trying to pretend he didn’t know exactly what was going on.

“Come on, you don’t believe Pep and I don’t talk, right? I wouldn’t survive being married to Tony otherwise!”

The teen felt his face grow hot. He crossed his arms, glaring at the man. “Fine! Then I will go talk to Sam and Bucky and they’ll tell me all your secrets!”, he declared, grabbing his school bag.

Steve almost spit out his coffee. “No! Don’t you dare!”

“Oh, what now? Do you want to stop me from going to school?”, Peter challenged him with an evil grin.

Steve gave him his best ‘Captain America look’, but the teen only giggled.

“How are you so immune to that?”, Tony wondered when he wandered in. “I’ve been living with him for seven years now, and that look still hounds me in my dreams!”, he shuddered.

“Guess I’m just used to it thanks to all those PSA’s,” Peter shrugged.

“They are still showing those?”, Steve groaned, while Tony busted out laughing.

“Oh Petey! The viewing party we had when we found out about them! It was absolutely amazing, you should have been there!”

“I’ll make sure to be there next time!”, Peter grinned, finally making his way to the door.

“Have a good day at school!”, Steve called after him.

“We love you,” Tony added, far too casually for something so world-shattering. Peter stopped dead in his tracks, the smile frozen on his face and his back turned to the adults, which he was incredibly grateful for.

“I- I- Yeah, me too. Bye!”, he quickly called out, jumping through the elevator doors which closed behind him before they had even fully opened, spearing him from the awkward silence.

“Thanks Fri,” he sighed, falling back against the wall.

“Of course, Peter,” the AI assured him.

.....

MJ was having a pretty great day. Her mum and dad had let her have cake for breakfast and at school she had been greeted by her losers, who were overjoyed to celebrate her birthday with her. Ned was pretty much the same he had always been, but something about Peter had clearly changed. He seemed less tired, calmer and just all in all more balanced.

Another change she had really welcomed was how much time he was now spending with not only Ned, but also her. MJ hadn't meant to fall for him, quite the opposite really. Relationships and love were not really something she wanted to concentrate on at this point in her life, and developing feelings for one of her only two friends could get really messy.

The problem was, while she had always felt like there was potential, MJ had never bothered to explore her feelings for Peter. They had just lain dormant for a long time, since she almost exclusively saw him at school, but the past three weeks, things had changed.

Ned, Pete and her had hung out at least twice a week after school and once even on the weekend. On top of that, Peter had started to participate in conversations more, his true, beautiful personality shining through. And just like that, she had fallen for him.

Even though it hadn't been her plan to have her heart this involved, MJ was still glad they were getting their Peter back. After all, there had been reasons she felt that pull to the boy. His humor, his intelligence, his adorable little smile... She had missed it all. MJ would be okay should they not work out or should Peter simply not return her feelings, but she wouldn't let go of this amazing person again.

As they had discussed, Peter and Ned dragged her to a very nice cafe after school, promising to pay for whatever she wanted to order and proudly presenting their gift. Tears filled her eyes when she unwrapped the used set of colored pencils. The black and white ones were already half way gone and the lid of the box didn't close right, and yet it was the most wonderful present she had ever received. Clearly her friends had spent hours finding a set of this quality and size they could afford.

After giving both of them a tight hug, she sank back in her armchair, admiring the set.

"There's actually another surprise," Peter told her, making her head shoot up. He said it with such gravity, it made her heart beat faster.

"But Peter... This is already perfect."

He blushed and looked down at his hands. "Look... I have to say something first, if that's alright?"

She gave him an encouraging nod, and he took a deep breath.

"Look, MJ, I know the past year I haven't been the best friend. To either of you," he added, throwing a glance at Ned, who was beginning to shake his head.

"That's bullshit," MJ declared, crossing her arms.

Peter gave her a shy little smile. "It's not though. I've been absent, moody and self-absorbed. Had I talked to you, things might have been different, so I'd like to apologize and--"

"You lost your family!", MJ cut him off. "Many people would have reacted far worse. Your whole life was turned upside down."

"That's actually why I didn't want to talk to you guys," Peter whispered, his voice trembling a little, so MJ reached out to grip his arm tightly as he continued. "You two have been one of the few actually good things in my life, and I wanted to pretend everything was okay with you."

"I know there is more," MJ admitted. "It's okay if you are not ready, but once you are, I'll be here for you."

"Thank you," he nodded. "I'm still sorry for-"

"Stop it!", Ned interrupted, to MJ's shock tears streaming down his face. "Peter, what happened to you...", he trailed off, throwing a quick glance at MJ as he wiped away the wetness on his face. "You don't have to apologize!"

"An explanation is not the same as an excuse," Peter said sadly.

"You are right," MJ agreed. "But it is clear you are taking responsibility and are willing to change and communicate more. That's all we could ask for."

Peter nodded, blinking rapidly in order to get rid of the tears forming in his eyes. MJ gave his arm another squeeze, glad he was finally opening up.

"So... where is my surprise?", she joked, trying to lighten the mood.

Peter checked his phone. "She should be here any minute now."

'She?', MJ wondered, just as Peter's face lit up and his eyes settled on something behind MJ. She turned around, her questions dying in her throat as her eyes fell on the woman who was approaching their table.

"Pepper! May I introduce you to Ned Leeds and Michelle Jones? Guys, meet Pepper Potts!"

MJ didn't know how to act. This was Pepper Potts. The Pepper Potts. She had watched the woman shut up dumbass politicians and interviewers with a single look since she had been a little girl. And now her hero was actually standing in front of her, the narrowed eyes and tight lips replaced by a happy and open expression.

"Ms. Potts! It's an honor to meet you," she quickly greeted her, standing up to shake her hand.

"Oh I sure hope so!", Pepper Potts laughed. "After all I am supposed to be the birthday gift! Perhaps I should have placed a bow in my hair?"

"But Pep, you are already so beautiful," Peter commented with a fake sweet smile.

"Who told you flattery would get you anywhere? Tony? That man is ruining you!", Ms. Potts replied with another chuckle.

"God no, I only listen to Steve," Peter promised.

"Not much better," the CEO shrugged, before taking a seat next to Peter and across from MJ. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Jones. Peter told me all about you."

"Pepper!", Peter groaned, a blush creeping over his cheeks.

"About both of you, of course," the woman added smoothly, giving Ned a warm smile which he replied to with an awestruck stare and an awkward wave.

"I'm sorry, but may I ask how you know Peter? This is indeed quite the surprise," MJ asked.

"Oh, let's just say we are family," Ms. Potts said, shooting a warm smile at Peter.

“But he never mentioned-”

“A recent development,” the CEO explained, only making more questions pop up in MJ’s head.

The next hour was the most fascinating she had ever experienced. Peter must have talked about her a lot, Ms. Potts knew many details about her recent school projects and other interests and freely offered advice and anecdotes.

“Sadly I will have to leave you now,” Ms. Potts declared after a while, “but I do have some business to attend to. Ms. Jones, Mr. Leeds, I am looking forward to meeting you two again. Young people like you do make me feel quite hopeful about the future.”

After she was gone, MJ let out a long sigh as she buried her face in her hands. “Oh my god. That was Pepper Potts. THE Pepper Potts. Peter, what the hell?!”

“Surprise...?”, her idiot offered.

MJ took a few minutes to calm down, before directing her attention at Peter again. “She mentioned a Tony? Peter, are you secretly hanging out with Tony Stark?”

The silence that followed was clear. “Is it because of Spiderman?”

Ned chocking on the milkshake he had been drinking and Peter’s mouth gaping open were quite hilarious to observe.

“You know?”

“How do you know?”

“Ned, did you tell her?!”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

MJ held up her hands to silence their questions. “Guys, please! Are you aware neither of you can whisper? I found out months ago, I just thought Peter needed more time.”

“I didn’t tell Ned!”, the boy said suddenly. “He just saw me in the suit. I- I promise it’s not because I trust him more or anything, I just...”

“It’s fine,” she said honestly. “I know you don’t like being the center of attention. I’m worried though. Is that why you know Stark? Are you safe?”

“Tony doesn’t even know!”, Peter groaned. “There is another reason I know him. Look, there’s a lot going on. I want to tell you, but... It’s not a happy story and this is your birthday.”

“I don’t mind a bit of drama,” MJ shrugged, “Just need to know there is a happy ending.”

Peter nodded and started talking.

Chapter End Notes

Get ready, next time there will be some actual plot!

Chapter 17

Steve couldn't believe how well things were going. Peter had been with them for three weeks now, and so far, everything was working out fine. While he did think Tony and him were doing all they could, the main reason for things being so easy was the boy. In simple terms, Peter was a good kid. That was why it broke Steve's heart every time one of them messed up, the way he did Thursday morning.

"Peter, please remember to clean your room, pack your things and find a friend to stay with Friday after school," Steve said casually over breakfast.

A loud clang echoed through the room as the kid dropped his fork, staring at Steve like he had grown a second head. Just as the Avenger was about to ask what the problem was, Peter answered.

"Yes, I- I understand. But... Can I ask something?"

"Sure?", Steve said, not sure why his poor boy looked close to tears.

"May I come back another day, or... or should I take all my things, sir?"

"What?! Wait, didn't Tony talk to you already?"

"No, Mr. Stark didn't mention anything," Peter shrugged not meeting his eyes.

Within a heartbeat, Steve had risen from his chair and pulled the kid into his arms. "Oh sweetheart, I'm sorry for making it sound so scary. Of course you are coming back home for dinner on Friday."

"You are not kicking me out?", Peter sniffed, relaxing into the embrace.

"Never!", Steve promised. "We love you. There is just someone coming in for an inspection and we can't have anyone find out about your whereabouts yet."

"Oh...", Peter answered, sounding far calmer now. "In that case I can just hang out with MJ and Ned before dinner."

"Good," Steve sighed, falling back down in his chair. "Now finish your fruit, you have to leave for school in a few minutes."

.....

Two days later, Steve and Peter were sitting on a bench in the park near the tower, enjoying cups of hot chocolate, when his phone rang. He was a bit annoyed to be interrupted, but the feeling quickly vanished when a picture of his husband appeared on the screen.

"Hi Tony," he greeted cheerfully.

"Babe, have you kidnapped the kid?"

"I thought we discussed this. It's not kidnapping if he comes willingly."

"No, we said it's not kidnapping when no one is trying to get him back on top of that. And right now, I need you two at the tower."

Steve frowned at the urgency in his husband's voice. "Is everything alright?"

"Better than alright," Tony said in a way that made it easy to picture the triumphant smile that was clearly stretching over his face. "I have good news."

"Let me guess, you won't tell me on the phone?"

"Nope!"

"Okay, Pete and I will be there in 10 minutes," he promised.

"Hurry!", his husband chuckled and hung up, making hi wonder whether he should be excited or scared.

"What's wrong?", Peter asked when Steve stood up.

"Nothing, but it's time to go home now."

The kid stood up as well, but before they could leave, a sharp voice interrupted them. "Parker! Peter Parker!"

Steve turned around to see a short woman with blond hair, tightly combed back into a neat bun, wearing a dark red dress and a black blazer, staring at them.

"M-Mrs. Wart...", Peter stuttered, taking a step back and bumping into Steve.

"Mr. Parker! I find you a perfectly good home, and you treat that kind, innocent couple with disrespect?!"

"I- I didn't..."

"Be quiet! We've got all the complaints filed! Stealing, disobedience, violence... What a disgrace!"

"Excuse me!", Steve interrupted, putting his body between Peter and the yelling woman. "What gives you the right to yell at this child? Last time I checked, he was able to hear just fine, so there is no reason to raise your voice!"

"I am unfortunate enough to be his case worker, Karen Wart! The boy that is so pathetically hiding behind you, is Peter Parker, a runaway and a criminal!"

Steve's heart stopped. They had found them. Tony and he weren't ready yet! Before he could panic more, he felt Peter's thin fingers wrap around his wrist and give it a firm squeeze to get his attention.

"I'll be where you found me last time," the kid whispered, just loud enough for his enhanced hearing to pick it up, before he let go and sprinted across the grass, disappearing between a line of trees.

"Come back!", Mrs. Wart shrieked, but Peter was already gone. She turned back around to Steve, fixing him with a disgusted glare. "How dare you hide this boy! Don't think this won't have consequences, I know very well where to find you," she huffed, throwing an angry look at the tower looming over them.

Even though he desperately wanted her to leave, Steve couldn't help but call after her. "Are you not even gonna look for him?", he asked, gesturing to the trees Peter had fled to.

“For an ungrateful brat? I’d rather not,” the woman said, turned up her nose and strutted away.

Steve stared after her, considering whether Tony’s lawyers could protect him if he killed her in public. In the end he just angrily shook his head and pulled out his phone to text a few short sentences to his husband, explaining the situation. Then he took off, earning himself some concerned glances as civilians recognized Captain America sprinting through New York as if there was another alien invasion to fight off.

When Steve reached the bridge, he was out of breath and his legs were burning, but it all didn’t matter when his eyes settled on the trembling form hiding in the shadows. Peter had his knees drawn up to his chest and his face tilted downwards as he gently rocked his body back and forth. Suddenly Steve felt himself reminded of how they had met, the boy crying on that bathroom floor, afraid of both him and his husband.

“Peter?”, he called out, coming closer but making sure not to move too quickly.

The kid’s head shot up and Steve winced when he noticed the glistening tears in his eyes. “You came!”

“Of course I came,” Steve reassured him. “I will always come to find you.”

“I wanna go home. Can we go home?”, Peter sobbed, his rocking becoming faster.

“Of course darling, come here,” Steve told him, pulling the trembling teen into his arms. Just at that moment, a familiar car pulled up next to them and the window rolled down.

“Get in,” Tony told them, a hard look on his face.

Steve nodded and carried Peter to the car, gently placing him on the backseat before taking off his jacket to tuck it around his shoulders. When he tried to pull away, a shaky hand fisted in his sweater. Steve got the message and took a seat next to the boy, who immediately curled into his side.

“What have you told her?”, Tony asked, his cold mask slipping a little as his eyes flickered to them.

“Not much. Should have told her where to stick it to be honest, but-”

“No,” Tony interrupted. “I need to know what information she has. I share your feelings, but now is not the time.”

Steve nodded when he realized what his husband meant. “As I said, not much. I didn’t give her any information on how I know him or what I know about his situation. But she heard me tell him we’d go home.”

“Hmm. We can twist that,” Tony decided. “Say you meant your home, not a shared one.”

“What?”, Peter whimpered lifting his head, but Steve quickly placed a hand on his hair and pulled him against his chest again.

“Shh, don’t worry. Just some legal terms. We’re going home.” He looked down at the child he knew he had to protect. “Tony, how can we win this?”

To his surprise, his husband smirked when their eyes met in the review mirror. “I told you, good news, remember? The foster agency cleared us. We are officially allowed to house teenage foster

kids.”

“Tony! You should have said that earlier!”, Steve gasped, his grip tightening around Peter, who was staring up at him with wide eyes.

“F-Foster agency?”

“We told you we’d find a way to keep you,” Tony told him. “Now we just need to keep our story consistent and lie like we have never lied before.”

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

ony ushered his disturbed kid and tense husband inside, thanking the universe for sending him Steve Rogers. While the billionaire was already working out a careful construct of lies and a solid legal defense, at his core he was panicking. Tony knew his voice had gotten cold and his face blank, but his hands were shaking. Steve on the other hand seemed truly calm, but at a complete loss what to do, so he just held on to Peter.

“Friday, send a message to the Avengers and Happy. Tell them to stick to the intern story should anyone ask if they know anything about Peter. Steve, taking him up to his room. Pack up the closet and all personal items. Put some stuff in his backpack. Make it look like an overnight bag,” he ordered, before slowing down to look at the boy pressed against his husband’s side. “And Peter?”

“Yes sir?”

Tony winced at the tremble in the kid’s voice. “Whatever happens, you are not going back to those foster parents. I can guarantee it.”

“That’s not enough!”, Peter snapped. “I want to stay here! With you!”

“I- I will do my best,” Tony said defeated, unable to lie to the kid.

“But I’ll miss you so much when they take me away,” the boy sobbed. “All of you! You are my home.”

“You won’t have to miss us,” Steve promised. “No matter what happens, we will take care of you. We won’t just leave you.”

Steve took Peter upstairs, letting Tony know when the kid was calm enough to get over the story. It only took three more hours until Friday announced a social worker was there to see them and Tony reluctantly allowed them upstairs, telling Steve and Peter to stay put for the moment.

Tony almost dropped his perfectly blinding press smile when the elevator doors slid open. Instead of the vile blond woman Steve had described, there stood a tall man with dark skin and dreadlocks tied up in a pony tail, wearing a green vest over a somewhat wrinkly white shirt.

“Uh, and you are?”, Tony asked surprised.

“Carlyle Smith,” the man said, offering his hand which Tony reflexively shook. “I am here to pick up Peter Parker.”

“I do not believe that is necessary, my intern is staying here for the night” Tony said, his smile turning even colder. “Besides, I am still not sure who you are.”

“Well, I work for Child Protective Services, but I am sure you were already expecting me, considering you are housing a runaway minor,” he replied, pulling his credentials out of his pocket.

“Runaway? Housing?”, Tony asked, trying to sound as innocent as possible. “As far as I know, Peter Parker lives with his aunt, right? May Parker? Why would CPS be involved?”

“May Parker is dead,” the man said flatly, narrowing his eyes.

“Dead?!”, Tony exclaimed. “Oh no, Peter will be devastated!”

“Oh he was,” Mr. Smith nodded. “A year ago, when she died.”

“A year ago?”, Tony asked, raising his eyebrows. “Are you saying I have been exchanging emails with a ghost?”

“Apparently many people have,” the man hummed. “But I think you have been aware of this for a while now.”

Realizing his little ploy was never going to work, Tony let his smile drop. “What are you accusing me of, Mr. Smith?”

“Oh, I would never accuse you of anything, Mr. Stark. I’d rather not have to deal with you lawyers. I’m guessing those lovely people found the information on Mr. and Mrs. Mitchel, Peter Parker’s former fosters? Who would have guessed that sweet suburban couple was involved in drug deals and violent crimes? I’m sure not even Peter knew.”

Tony let out a dark chuckle. “Are you saying you placed a defenseless minor with dangerous criminals?”

At that, the man’s face fell and there was something raw and real in his eyes. “I suppose I am...” He suddenly seemed very interested in the view out the window and Tony could have sworn he heard him whisper, “Never should have trusted a damn Karen...”

Mr. Smith’s eyes snapped back to Tony, a smirk tugging on his lips. “See, Mr. Stark, we didn’t even have this information until a few hours ago, when a complete case file was not only sent to the police, but also to CPS. Should there have been anything... unpleasant... going on at that house, Peter’s testimony would be welcome, but won’t be needed to put them in prison.”

“What a lucky coincidence.”

“Mr. Stark,” the man said firmly. “I need to talk to Peter immediately.”

“What if he doesn’t want to talk?”, Tony challenged, tilting his head to the side.

“I’d rather not deal with your lawyers, or perhaps even your superhero friends, but I am willing to tear this place down to assure that minors whereabouts and safety.”

“Well...”, Tony sighed, “I guess we can ask him.” He took a few steps back towards the stairs and turned his head slightly, his eyes still not leaving the social worker. “Peter darling? There is someone here to see you!”

“You are calling your intern petnames?”, Mr. Smith asked, raising an eyebrow.

“What can I say, I am simply an affectionate person,” Tony shot back, silently cursing himself for his mistake.

A moment later, Steve and Peter appeared at the top of the stairs, the blond’s hand tightly gripping the boy’s shoulder as he lead the pale teen towards them. To Tony’s surprise, Peter shook off Steve’s hand halfway down, flying down the last few steps and throwing himself in the man’s arms. “Mr. Smith!”

“Hey there,” the social worker chuckled, placing a hand on the kid’s head. “How are you doing?”

“Surprisingly good!”, Peter giggled as he pulled back.

“Yeah?”, Mr. Smith asked. “Even though you are homeless right now?”

Peter tensed up, his face becoming blank. “I am,” he agreed and Tony could have facepalmed. That was the least convincing lie he had ever heard.

“I think you and I need to have a chat.”

“No,” Steve said immediately, pulling Peter back to his side.

“It’s okay, Steve,” Peter whispered, taking Mr. Smith by the arm and pulling him towards the stairs. “Let’s do this.”

.....

Peter had messed up already. How was he supposed to lie to Mr. Smith? He had expected the cold-hearted Mrs. Wart, not the kind man who had comforted him the first few days after his aunt’s death. He had lain awake many nights at the Michel’s or on the streets, wondering if Mr. Smith would have helped him if they hadn’t given Peter’s case to someone else.

Now the man was sitting across from him in Peter’s room, mustering him with those kind, all-knowing eyes.

“So... You are Tony Stark’s intern?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Peter, please don’t lie to me.”

“You lied first!”, Peter yelled, suddenly on his feet. “You told me I was going to be okay...”, he trailed off, falling back down on the sofa.

“Peter...”, Mr. Smith sighed, before shaking his head slightly. “How do you feel?”

“I’m scared,” Peter admitted, drawing his knees up to his chest.

“You won’t go back to them.”

It took a moment for him to register what had just been said, but when it did, Peter let out a relieved whimper.

“They hurt you, haven’t they?”, Mr. Smith asked, his voice calm.

“I- I don’t want to talk about it.”

“But have you?”, the man said, raising an eyebrow. “Talked about it, I mean?”

“Tony and Steve know,” Peter shrugged. “And MJ and Ned.”

“Your friends from school?”

“You remember them?”, Peter asked surprised, receiving a shrug in response.

“I told them and... I think the Avengers know,” Peter added. “Not the whole story, but... They get

it.”

Something flashed in Mr. Smith’s eyes. “You are hanging out with the Avengers now...?”

Suddenly Peter remembered a conversation he had had with the man a long time ago. He couldn’t help but grin. “Wait a second, didn’t you say you were a super hero fan too?!”

Mr. Smith rolled his eyes. “Peter please, I almost threw hands with Iron Man and Captain America just five minutes ago. Let’s not bring that up, I’m trying to look cool.”

They both chuckled, but soon Mr. Smith got serious again. “I have a few questions I need to ask.”

“I know...”

“It will be okay Peter. This time for real.”

“I know,” he grinned. “Tony freaking Stark promised me.”

“You once told me powerful people were scary,” Mr. Smith reminded him of the conversation they had shared in front of that apartment building, surrounded by policemen.

“It’s okay when they are on your side,” Peter decided.

“And Tony is?”

Peter nodded, no doubt in his mind.

“How long have you been here?”

“A month maybe?”, he guessed.

“Before that?”

Peter just shrugged.

“I see... Tell me about living with them.”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it!”

Mr. Smith shook his head, giving him a reassuring smile. “Not the Michel’s. Them,” he explained, gesturing to the door leading to the hallway, stairs and living room.

So Peter told him. About pancakes in the morning. About working in the lab, finally actually learning something interesting. About silly jokes and firm hugs that eased his worry. About meeting the Avengers. About ducking away from hits that never came. About sleepless nights, made bearable by chatting with Steve on the sofa, both of them sipping hot chocolate. About feeling like he belonged.

“Well, Peter, you must be excited to move in with Tony Stark and Steve Rogers!”

“I- I’m sorry?”

Mr. Smith gave him a long look. “Well, considering that you have been living alone on the streets until now, it’s a real upgrade!”

“You- You are helping me? Us?”, Peter added, tears welling up in his eyes.

“Did you know I was the social worker approving them as foster parents?”, the man said suddenly. “I didn’t do the home inspection or the interview, but I checked the paperwork and gave the final okay. Home, money... obviously those things aren’t lacking, but their statements... Peter, I will be honest with you, you are not an easy child to take care of.”

“Oh...”, Peter said, not sure how he felt about that.

“No one in your situation would be. Not everyone is prepared to deal with trauma, but often we just have to send the kids anyways. These guys however...” Mr. Smith nodded to himself. “They are more than willing to learn and adapt. On top of that, you are a genius of course.”

“I- I’m not-”

“I’ve seen your school work and IQ test. Another... challenge. Somehow you have managed to find yourself the perfect placement. I won’t take it away just because they have ‘illegally’ taken care of you for a few weeks.”

“Thank you,” Peter choked out, the tears finally breaking free and rolling down his face.

.....

Steve was pacing around the living room, while Tony was sitting on the couch, just staring ahead. After almost an hour, there were finally steps on the stairs. Steve whirled around to see their kid with bloodshot eyes and trembling legs. He was going to strangle that man!

Instead, he wordlessly opened his arms for Peter, who buried his face in his chest. “I’ve got you,” Steve whispered to the boy as Tony’s arms wrapped around the two of them.

After a few minutes, the sound of Mr. Smith clearing his throat made them jump apart. “Well, Mr. Stark, Mr. Rogers, I will leave soon, but I will check in again next week.”

“I- I’m sorry?”, Steve asked, his mind not quite catching up.

The man gave him an annoying little grin, before turning to Tony. “Thank you for your email, by the way.”

“Email?”, Tony asked, apparently just as confused as Steve.

“Oh you know,” the social worker said casually. “The email Mr. Tony Stark send me after the encounter with my colleague, Mrs. Wart, declaring he had just learned CPS was looking for his intern, sent several hours before my arrival here,” he added, winking at Tony. “To which I responded of course, filling him in on the details, causing him to offer to take Peter Parker in, considering he is the child who inspired you two to foster a teenager.”

“Let me be clear, you want me to fake the emails?”, Tony asked, all his usual flare gone and replaced by worry and tenseness.

“I heard that is something some people can do,” Mr. Smith chuckled, winking at Peter who turned red with embarrassment.

“I- I don’t understand,” Steve said, his face scrunching up with worry as he reached out for his husband’s hand while placing the arm around Peter.

Mr. Smith mustered their little family with a soft smile. “I am sending the documents when I get back to my office. As soon as you sign them, you are officially Peter Parker’s foster parents.”

Steve froze, but he heard Tony suck in a harsh breath as he pulled Peter closer to them. They discussed the details with Mr. Smith, after thanking him over and over again for his help. When he finally left, not only Peter, but also Steve and Tony gave him a firm hug.

“Well,” Steve chuckled in disbelief after the elevator doors had slid shut behind their guest. “Welcome to the family, Petey!”

“We love you, son,” Tony whispered, pulling their child into his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Hey!!! So, as you might have noticed, my upload schedule has become a lot slower. Don't worry, I'm not giving up on writing, it's just university and homework :)

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

uff... this is not exactly my favorite chapter, but I hope you enjoy it anyways!

Bucky was polishing his knives and bickering with Sam down in the gym, when the elevator doors slid open and some kind of victory music started blaring from the speakers. In walked Tony and Steve, framing Peter. Each of the men had a hand on the boy's shoulders, who's face was glowing red.

"Ay! Barnes!", Stark shouted. "Remember when you threatened to steal our kid if we don't hurry up and make it official?"

For a second Bucky felt confused, then it dawned on him. He could feel Sam's hand grasping his arm as the other man also realized what was happening.

"Wait, for real?", he asked, his eyes darting between his best friend and his husband. "Stevie?"

"He's officially and legally ours! Since yesterday evening, we are Peter Parker's foster parents!", Steve yelled over the music, gripping the kid by the shoulders and shaking him a bit. The teen looked down shyly, but the huge grin on his face showed how he felt about the situation.

"Yes!", Sam cheered, grinning at Bucky. "We are uncles!"

"Oh my god...", Bucky whispered, before whirling around to stare at the kid. "Can we hug you?"

As soon as Peter nodded, they pulled him away from his proudly grinning parents. At some point the super soldier even managed to lift the boy up so he could stand on his shoulders.

"What's up? Fri said there was a team meeting?", Nat asked as she walked in, followed by Clint and Bruce.

"My 'intern'," Tony declared, "Is officially our foster kid!"

Nat walked over to give Peter a high five, while Clint ruffled his hair and congratulated him on officially being an honorary Avenger. Bruce gave him a handshake and a shy smile, which Peter returned.

"Hey, when-", Sam was cut off by a low rumbling and a tremble going through the tower.

"He's here...", Bruce whispered his eyes darting to the ceiling.

"Yes!", Clint cheered, pumping his fist. "He promised to bring me space treats!"

"I'm sorry, what is happening?", Peter asked.

"Thor is home," Sam explained with a grin.

"T-THOR?!", the kid gasped. "Really?"

“Seriously, why are you fanboying over everyone but Steve and me?”, Tony asked, crossing his arms.

“I’ll go get him,” Bruce said, already moving towards the door.

They waited a few minutes, Steve and Tony answering a few questions Peter was rapidly firing at them. When the elevator doors opened again, the booming voice of the god of thunder shook the room. “Where is the child?”

Peter jumped and looked to Tony in a mixture of excitement and fear.

“Thor!”, Steve scolded the god. “I am very happy to see you, but please use your inside voice, would you?”

The rest of the avengers snickered as Thor mumbled an apology, before his eyes fell on Peter. “Oh! You are bigger than I expected, young friend! I thought I was quite familiar with the aging process of midgardians, but looks like I was mistaken! How old are you then? Two months? Maybe three?”

“Uh...”, Peter said, looking a bit taken aback. “I’m 15 years old, actually?”

“Odin’s beard, how long was I gone?!”, Thor exclaimed, gripping his chest in shock. “I am truly sorry,” he added, throwing a look at Bruce and then at the rest of them. “I did not mean to miss out on more of your lives than necessary.”

“You dramatic moron,” Tony grinned fondly. “We are fostering him. He was born before we even met you, you were only gone for 4 months.”

“And 5 days,” Bruce added, earning himself a few chuckles.

“Fostering?”, Thor asked relieved.

“It’s like the free trial of adoption, so they can still give me back,” Peter explained casually.

“Peter!”, Tony and Steve said in unison, pulling him between them.

“Ah!”, Thor exclaimed, realization flashing over his face. “Adopted, yes! So you are family!”

He held out a hand for Peter, who was immediately pulled in for a one armed hug. Bucky remembered the kid’s reaction to learning he was going to meet Thor and smiled to himself.

“Strong handshake!”, Thor commented after letting go. “May I ask, do you ever stab people?”

“What, no!”, Peter said, his eyes going wide.

“Huh,” Thor nodded. “I was wondering whether that was an adoptee or a Loki thing...”

Thor let himself be greeted and hugged by the others, before turning to Bucky and bowing his head, his fist over his heart. Bucky rolled his eyes, catching Peter’s confused look.

“He insists on doing that every time he comes back from space,” he explained.

“You have been injured in battle and taken by the enemy, dear Shield Brother!”, Thor explained. “Asgardians respect that. Anyways, who wants space chocolate?”

.....

Peter still couldn't believe he was actually okay. Thanks to Mr. Smith, no one could take him away from his family. Family. That was how he was starting to see them as. Now that it was official, he felt a new sense of security and hope for the future.

Hanging out with Thor was awesome. The god seemed to be just excited about meeting Peter as the rest had been and was trying very hard to make a good impression and include the teen in everything. The one time Peter asked him about it, the man became very still and mumbled something about taking care of his family, blood or not. For a second he also thought Thor had said something like 'won't let someone down again'. The look Bruce had given him told Peter it was a sensitive subject, so he dropped it.

Being Spiderman became easier too. Peter felt stronger than ever and some of the fighting styles his... Well, his aunts and uncles, the fucking Avengers, had taught him worked really well with his powers. It was all going well, until his school caught fire.

The day started as normal as any other, but suddenly alarm bells started going off during second period. MJ, Ned and Peter had had a free period and studied in the library and calmly gathered their things, thinking it was just another drill. However, when he smelled the smoke, Peter froze, gripping Ned's arm.

"Get out as quickly as possible. Tell the teachers I went for a walk or something when they ask."

With that, he took off, sprinting towards the closest bathroom, making sure no one saw as he slipped inside to change into his Spidey suit. He dropped his backpack out the window, watching it fall into the bushes. Then Peter jumped after it, swinging down the street and then making a sharp turn so he could act like he was just arriving at the scene.

Peter swallowed nervously when he noticed the hands waving out of the highest windows. Apparently the fire had reached the staircase, trapping a whole class in their room. He had never dealt with something quite this big. Peter prayed to all the gods he could think of as he ran in, wishing he had made his suit out of less flammable materials.

It was strange, really. The students were all older than him, but the second they spotted him, the room became quiet as the teacher asked him what they were supposed to do. It looked like everyone recognized the masked hero of Queens.

He looked out of the window and swore. Apparently the firefighters had some kind of issue with their ladder. It only reached up to one floor below them, which they couldn't go to thanks to the fire. Peter decided to just lower the students individually down to the ladder where the firefighters waited for them to guide them down. When only one girl and the teacher were left, the student suddenly gasped out in horror. "Oh my god! Lisa! She went to the bathroom like twenty minutes ago!"

"What?!", the teacher, Mr. Walter, yelled. "When did that happen?"

"She slipped out when you were looking through our papers...", the girl admitted sheepishly.

"I'll find her," Peter promised, dread coiling in his stomach. "But for now, hold on to me."

He carried them down to the ladder, his arms burning and his lungs protesting from working so hard in smoke filled air. "One more inside!", he shouted to the firefighter before pulling himself back up.

Peter sprinted through the hall, thankful for his mask at least filtering the smoke a bit. He breathed

out in relief when he pushed open the bathroom door and noticed there was no smoke in there.

“Lisa!”, he called out, before his eyes fell on a girl, sitting by the window, earbuds in her ears, furiously scribbling in a book. With an eye roll Peter realized she was copying homework.

He walked up to her and tapped her shoulder, making her flinch.

“Hey what the- Spiderman?!”, she yelled.

“Lisa!”, Peter answered. “We gotta go!”

She sniffed the air and her eyes grew wide when she smelled the smoke. Peter instructed her to pull her hoodie over her nose and they made their way to the door, but before they could open it, it flew open, revealing to figures surrounded by smoke.

Peter froze when he saw both Iron Man and Captain America stare at him.

“Tony, take the girl, I’ll keep looking.”

“But-”

“Iron Man, now!”, Steve ordered and the hero was set into motion, simply lifting Lisa up and flying out the window.

“Who the hell are you?”, Steve spat, a strange look on his face.

“S-Spiderman?”, Peter said, trying to make his voice sound a bit deeper. The smoke really helped with that, but unfortunately it also made him cough his lungs up.

“Jesus...”, Steve whispered, steadying him. “You were organizing the rescue?”

Peter nodded. “Yes, sir. Don’t worry, Lisa was the last one.”

“No she wasn’t,” Tony said as he flew back in and dropped down next to them.

“We- We are looking for a boy. Short, white, skinny, brown hair? You- You have seen him right?”, Steve asked, his voice trembling.

“Blue shirt. I-I think,” Tony added, his voice sounding panicked, even through the suit. “God, Steve, what was he wearing?!”

“I- I-”, Steve stuttered. “I don’t-”, he turned back to Peter. “We checked the crowd, but he wasn’t there.”

“Listen,” Peter answered, getting a bit nervous about all of them just standing around in the smoke. He wished he could just tell them Peter Parker had gone for a walk, but that would raise suspicion. “I saw a kid like that a few blocks from here. Maybe check with his friends or something?”

“On it,” Tony said, already flying off. Only a minute later, there was a muffled voice coming from Steve’s intercom.

“Oh thank god,” the man gasped, his eyes filling up with tears and it didn’t look like that was from the smoke. “Okay, all clear, we gotta go,” he said, reaching out for Peter.

“It’s fine, I can handle myself,” the teen said and jumped out the window. He landed gracefully at the back of the building, throwing a quick salute at Steve who was staring after him before running

to the bushes to subtly grab his stuff before taking off.

After changing back into his normal clothes, Peter walked around the building, greeting his teacher as if he had just gotten back. He got scolded for just leaving school grounds, but Mr. Harrington was simply glad everyone was alive, so he soon dropped the issue. MJ and Ned subtly high fived him as everyone cheered for Spiderman.

When everyone had calmed down a bit, they were told they could just go home and the school was going to send emails explaining what was going to happen next and how badly the building had been damaged.

Peter decided to simply swing home, so he started walking towards a dark alleyway, when a black car slowed down next to him. A muscly arm shot out and pulled him on the backseat, before slamming the door shut.

Chapter 20

As soon as Steve had snatched him from the streets, Tony pulled their kid into his arms, letting out a shuddering breath. “There you are. God, Petey, we were so worried!”

“What the fuck?”, Peter shrieked, but relaxed once he realized who was holding him.

“Language!”, Steve chuckled, also wrapping his arms around the teen, before abruptly pulling back. Tony watched in confusion as his husband leaned in again to sniff the boy’s hair. “Smoke. Why do you smell like smoke?”

“Ned said he was out long before the fire even started...?”, Tony said, more to himself than to Steve or Peter, or even Happy, who was trying his best to not stare at the kid through the review mirror, yet failing miserably.

“I- I-”, Peter stuttered, his wide eyes darting between both his foster fathers who were still holding him close. “I may have gone back in?”

“What?!”, Tony asked, his hand tightening on Peter’s arm for just a moment before he realized what he was doing and pulled back.

“Why on earth would you do that?”, asked Steve, sounding just as upset as Tony felt.

“I- uh- I forgot... my backpack...?”, the kid offered, looking down shyly.

“Your backpack...”, Tony growled darkly. “You ran into a BURNING building, to get your backpack?! How dare you be so irresponsible!”

“Tony!”, Steve warned, but then his gaze settled on Peter. “He’s not wrong. You could have gotten hurt!”

“I’m sorry...”

“Sorry doesn’t cut it, buddy!”, Tony told him sternly. “You are so grounded!”

“What, no!”, Peter gasped. “You can’t do that!”

“Oh, but we can!”, Steve agreed.

“What happened to just providing the necessities and otherwise being chill?”, Peter asked, crossing his arms.

“Oh my god!”, Tony groaned. “We were lying! That was never the plan! Guess what, you are a minor, you are getting parented!”

“But you are not my parents!”

“Maybe not,” Steve sighed. “But we are your guardians. We can’t let you get hurt.”

“I didn’t though! I just wanted to get my stuff, you don’t have to be so dramatic!”

“Dramatic?! Kid, you-”

“Why am I always getting in trouble? I didn’t do anything bad!”

“Nothing bad?”, Tony hissed, feeling his face begin to turn red. “Peter, you-”

“I had to!”, Peter cut him off again, crossing his arms.

“Oh...”, Steve whispered before Tony could response. “Oh, Petey. Were you scared to lose your things? You know we would have replaced them, right?”

Suddenly the useless excuses started to make sense. Tony’s anger roared up again, but this time it was not directed at the kid. More specifically, it was directed at everyone and everyone BUT Peter. The whole ugly, rotten world.

“Oh, Peter, I’m sorry, I-”

“NO!”, the boy shouted suddenly, a mixture of horror and guilt on his face. “That’s not what this is about!”

“Peter, we understand if-”, Steve tried, but the teen started shaking his head. “No. Just ground be, that’s fine, but we are not doing this whole sad orphan thing! That is NOT what this is about.”

“Peter, we can talk about-”

“Fuck you, Steven!”

Suddenly it got very quiet. Steve and Peter were just staring at each other and had the situation not been so dire, Tony might have wished for some popcorn.

Peter’s mouth dropped open as he was seemingly shocked by what he had done. At the same time, Steve’s body began to shake with giggles.

“Did- Did you just-” he bent over, trying to compose himself but failing. “Did you just call me Steven?!”

“Maybe...?”

“Steven, dearest,” Tony said, causing the other man to laugh even harder, “Please stay on topic!”

“Right, right,” his husband gasped, clutching his chest as his laughter died down. “So. Grounded,” he said, pointing at Peter. “What are we thinking?”, he asked Tony. “Two weeks?”

“Yeah, fine with me,” Tony agreed. “AND I will poke him every five minutes to make sure he’s fine, staring now,” he added, jabbing his finger in the boy’s ribs.

“Hey!”, Peter complained through his giggles.

“Agreed,” Steve said and also reached over to poke the kid. All of them couldn’t help but laugh when Happy used a pencil to reach the teen and almost took out Tony’s eye in the process.

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“You!”

Peter flinched at the angry growl. He lifted his head to look up at the narrowed eyes and drawn together brows.

“H-Hey Buck!”

“Don’t ‘Buck’ me kiddo. Steve texted me. You little shit.”

“I’m sorry,” Peter said, feeling incredibly guilty.

“We are not losing more people,” Sam said, resting a hand on Bucky’s shoulder. “Be. More. Careful.”

“Yes, Sam,” Peter nodded. It had been three hours since the scolding in the car and after not only Happy, but also Pepper and Bruce had words with him, he was getting used to it.

“Just because he’s officially your father now, that doesn’t mean you have to become like Stevie,” Bucky grumbled and pulled Peter in a firm hug.

“Got any homework?”, Sam asked, his hand landing in Peter’s curls.

“My school will be closed for a bit,” Peter explained and Bucky’s arms tightened a little bit.

“Let’s relax a little,” Sam said and Peter had the feeling he was talking more to the super soldier than him. “Peter won’t have a good time once Nat and Clint come home.”

They settled down on the couch in the penthouse, watching some baking competition, only interrupted by Steve and Tony occasionally walking over to ever poke Peter’s face, ruffle his hair or rest a hand on his shoulder, reassuring themselves he was there and safe.

“No,” Bucky growled when Peter tried to get up to get a snack. “Sam can do it.”

“Hey!”, the man complained, but he went to the kitchen anyways, while Bucky pulled Peter back to his side.

.....

Peter felt incredibly guilty as he slipped the mask over his face. Being grounded hadn’t even been that bad. Ned had still been allowed to come over and once they had given him a long and thorough lecture, Tony and Steve had not been angry anymore.

And yet, Peter was breaking the rules already. Hew was supposed to be grounded for one more week, but his restlessness was driving him insane. He had considered going to the gym to get rid of some energy, but having to hold himself back in order to keep his secret got old fast. At least he was still doing something good when breaking the rules to go patrolling.

After half an hour, he had already helped a guy who had fallen off his bike home and was sitting up on a rooftop, scanning the dark streets below.

“Helping home injured civilians? That’s cute. Were you a scout or something?”, a mechanical voice asked from above. Peter jumped up, doing a few flips before landing a few feet away from the hovering suit.

“T-Tony! How...” He couldn’t even form his question, too distracted by his racing thoughts. How had Tony found out? Had he followed him? Found the suit in his room? Recognized his voice?

“Oh, are we on first name basis now?”, Iron Man teased. “In that case I think it’s only fair you tell me yours.”

Oh. Oh! He didn’t know it was Peter! That was... a bit better. It probably also meant he was about to be arrested, not just grounded for life.

“Tony! Be nice!”, another familiar voice called out. “We are here to thank him, remember?”

“Thank me?”, Peter asked, lowering his voice like he had during the fire and shifting closer to the edge of the roof, just in case.

“No need to jump,” Tony said as he tracked Peter’s motion. “He’s right. I- We-” He dropped out of the air, somehow managing to look vulnerable despite the heavy suit. “Steve?”

“Those kids... You saved their lives. P- Our kid. He- He could have been there.”

“He was there!”, Tony interrupted. “Just in the lower levels, but... I can’t even imagine what would have happened if he... god.” The face plate slid up, revealing a pale face and swimming eyes. While they had told him how worried they had been, both men had managed to conceal their emotions fairly well if this was how they really felt.

“You have a- a son?”, Peter asked carefully, knowing it was what an outsider would be wondering about, but the words felt odd on his tongue.

“Yes,” Steve answered without hesitation.

“Best kid ever, just a little reckless,” Tony chuckled.

“Look,” Steve said, lowering his Shield. “Technically we’d have to arrest you, considering you are a vigilante, but we appreciate your help and know you are just trying to do good. Why don’t you tell us your name and we find a way for you to cooperate with the police?”

Peter let out a long sigh. Spiderman legally doing what he did? No more hiding from the police and leaving tied up criminals with sticky notes? Support from the Avengers? All that sounded amazing, but there was no way he’d ever give up his identity.

“You know what?”, he asked, smiling to himself as he took a step back. “Your kid isn’t the only reckless person out there.” And with that, he threw himself backwards, flipping off the roof a swinging away into the night.

.....

Tony couldn’t believe how quickly Spiderman had managed to lose them. He just hoped it would never become public that two Avengers had been tricked by some civilian in pajamas.

While Steve didn’t seem to care all that much, Tony couldn’t let what happened go. Something about that man... Something had made Tony feel... protective? Concerned? Irritated? Amused? A mix of all those feelings?

To be honest, Tony didn’t even care all that much about recruiting him, he just wanted to know how a stranger had managed to shake his world so deeply. He needed to find out who was hiding behind that mask and why.

When he told his husband, Steve called him a sore loser and borderline insane, but he did so with a smile and a soft press of lips to his forehead.

They saw Spiderman again several times, but the stupid bug man managed to slip away every time. That was, until Thursday night two weeks later. Tony had actually been about to give up on his weird obsession, but then Friday had notified him of Spiderman stopping a fight not too far away from the tower. His heart clenched when he saw the knife slide into the man’s arm. Not a huge wound, but yet... Within a minute Tony was in his suit and on his way.

“Need a little help?”, Tony asked as he entered the alley. The masked man let out a high pitched yelp, spinning around to face Tony, his hand clutching the injured arm.

“N-Nope! All good!”

“Really?”, Tony said, his eyes narrowing. “Cause it looks like you need a ride to the hospital.”

“No!”, Spiderman replied, his eyes widening. “No hospital! It- It will heal quickly. I- I mean I’ll probably have to wear long sleeves in PE, but-”

“PE?”, Tony cut him off, only now realizing how high the guy’s voice had gotten. “Are- Are you in school?!”

“Uh...”

“Oh my god, please tell me you are not a minor!”, Tony shouted, remembering he had met Spiderman for the first time in an ON FIRE building.

“I- I won’t be for too much longer?”, the man, no, the BOY, the fucking CHILD, offered, but Tony could tell that was complete bullshit.

“How much longer?”

“Ugh... Like... 32 months?”

“You are 15?!”

Worry, sadness and raging terror shot through Tony. “Where the hell are your parents?! How can they even allow this? This is-”

“Shut up!”, the kid yelled at him. “They did nothing wrong, this is my problem to deal with.”

“Jesus kid, look at yourself!”, Tony replied, gesturing to SpiderBOY’s still bleeding arm. “You got hurt! They should-”

“My father’s don’t even know!”, the kid cut him off. “They are the best parents I could ask for and more than I deserve! You’ll not drag them into this!”

A strange feeling settled in Tony’s stomach, but he decided to dismiss it for now and focus on what the kid had said. “Fathers, eh?”

Spiderman’s hand shot up to cover his mouth when he realized what information he had given away. “Gotta go!”, he shouted, a web already flying up to latch onto the closest building.

“Wait, kid, don’t-!”, Tony tried to stop him, but it was already too late. Swearing he watched the child pull himself up with his trembling arm, thick drops of blood hitting the pavement below. Tony decided not to chase after him this time. Spidey had already exhausted himself too much and besides, Tony had some research to do.

.....

“A child!”

Steve jumped when Tony busted into the room. “Daring?”

“I went out to look for Spiderman again.”

Steve sighed. "I'm guessing he still didn't want to talk?"

"He was bleeding! A goddamn child, Steve!"

"A civilian got hurt?", Steve asked alarmed.

"No. Spiderman. He's the child!"

"What? You mean... He's a minor?", Steve asked, understanding the anger and worry on his husband's face.

Tony nodded. "Worse. He's not even close to becoming anything that could be considered an adult."

Something heavy and cold settled in Steve's stomach. The short and thin body. The high voice. The somewhat clumsy movements despite the enhanced balance and flexibility. The lighthearted jokes. "How young?"

"15."

Oh. 15. Like... Like their son. There was a kid out there, running into burning buildings and getting injured, who was Peter's age. And they were allowing it.

"Do his parents know?"

"No", Tony groaned. "I brought it up and he was defending them."

"Christ."

"Yeah."

"What do we do?", Steve asked.

"I'll find him," Tony promised. "Then we will see."

.....

15 years old, male, living in New York, probably Queens or Manhattan, birthday in August, two fathers... There were not many people matching that description.

Tony found a boy in Queens named James Blackwood, but when Friday pulled up a family picture it turned out he was almost 6 feet tall with broad shoulders, not short and lanky like the boy he was looking for.

Maybe born in July or September?

Two more kids. One too chubby, one too short this time.

Assigned female at birth and no legal sex change yet?

One boy in Brooklyn. Matching height and body type. Bulletproof alibis for at least two of the times Tony had met the vigilante.

How was this kid hiding from him?

Chapter 21

“And you still haven’t told them?”, MJ asked, leaning back to catch an M&M in her mouth. She had started hanging out with him in the tower a few weeks ago, claiming she was just there to steal the food.

“Of course not!”, Peter gasped, rapidly shaking his head. “Why would I do that?”

“Why wouldn’t you?”, she shot back. “You trust them, right?”

“Define trust,” Peter groaned. “Trust them to not throw me in prison? Yeah, they didn’t even want to arrest Spiderman without knowing who he is. To let me keep doing it? No way, they’ll freak out.”

“Hmm...”, MJ said, fixing him with a frighteningly intelligent look. “You are deflecting.”

“Am not!”

“Don’t bullshit me, Parker. Not arresting you? Not letting you fight dangerous criminals? That’s pretty standard. No nuance. What about the stuff in between?”

Peter’s hands began to sweat. The dread that had been waiting in his core finally began to spread, climbing up his throat, taking over his voice. “Leave.”

“Excuse me?”

“Get out!”

“Peter, it’s okay.”

“Leave. Please, leave! I don’t want you here!”

MJ’s eyes widened at his words. Peter felt awful, but it was already too late. The fear and anger were taking over every last part of his mind.

“Alright then.”

Peter felt like throwing up at her words. It had been going so well. Everything had been going so well, why was he like this? Was he just too broken at this point? Too broken for anything good to last? Too used to pain that he had to manipulate the few good things he actually had?

“I’ll leave now.”

Peter had to hold back a sob. At least MJ had already turned around, so she couldn’t see the tears forming in his eyes.

“But I will pick up when you call. Remember to breathe, Spiderboy.”

The door fell shut behind her and Peter fell to the floor. Sometimes he hated her honesty. MJ was right of course. It was the stuff in between that scared him. It was still hard to believe sometimes, but it looked like Tony and Steve were serious about wanting him with them. At times he still got scared they’d hit or yell or send him away, but mostly he managed a more logic based decision making process. But this... Telling them would not risk his life or freedom, but his happiness. Peter had gotten so used to being loved. He couldn’t give it up. Not yet.

He only noticed he had been hyperventilating for the past few minutes when his vision began to blur. God, his head hurt so much. Peter's hands came up to pull his hair, but not even the pain could bring him back.

Throwing all caution to the wind, he fumbled with his phone, but it fell to the floor before he could get a single word out. Instead, he just curled up with his back to the wall, waiting for it all to end.

"I told you to breath, dumbass."

Peter's head shot up, making him even more dizzy. "You- You came back," he gasped through his panting breaths.

"Never left," MJ told him, handing him a bag, which he immediately pressed against his face.

"Hug or no hug?", she asked as she slid down the wall next to him.

Peter just whimpered as he fell into her side, relieved by the feeling of her arms finally settling around him. "I-I-I-" he had to press the bag against his face again to calm his breathing enough to get a few words out. "I'm so sorry."

"I've got you, Pete," MJ whispered, but her voice seemed to come from very far away. "I'm not angry. It's all going to be okay."

The noise of his own panicked panting was cut off by the sound of guitars and drums as MJ slipped earbuds into his ears and began to stroke his hair until he relaxed against her, just staring ahead, his heart still racing, but his mind finally quiet.

.....

"Kid?", Tony asked at dinner, an uneasy feeling creeping over him. "What happened today?"

"What do you mean?", Peter asked, poking at his pasta with a frown.

"You seem... distracted? Did something happen with you and Michelle? Nat said she didn't even greet her and ran upstairs when you called her?"

"Where is Steve?"

"Sorry?", Tony asked, taken aback by the sudden question, before his mind caught up. "Oh! Yeah, he's out with Sam and Bucky. Why? Would you rather talk to him? I'm sure if we called he could take a minute-"

"No, don't," Peter cut him off with a deep sigh. Tony was getting really worried now. Their kid had his moments, but usually he was such a lighthearted presence. Now he looked utterly defeated. "I was just... deflecting."

"Deflecting?", Tony repeated.

"Apparently that's something I do," the kid sighed with a bitter smile. For a moment Tony could see all the weight pressing down on his shoulders. Could see just how long and painful the road that had led him there had been. Maybe he was judging his boy too harshly when freaking out about his reckless plans and dread of the world. It had kept him alive so far, after all.

"Peter?"

"To answer your question, I had a terrible day, but it's all sorted out and now I'm just... I'm so

tired.”

Tony nodded, giving the kid the softest smile he could muster. “Okay darling, take your time.”

.....

After dinner, Peter just went up to his room. He hadn’t even managed to thank Tony properly, but somehow he knew the man didn’t mind. At least not today.

Peter’s eyes went to the window, where the first few white spots were already appearing. Thanks to his enhanced sight he could see the tiny strands of the snowflakes even without getting closer. The snowstorm was supposed to last for at least a whole day. Now or never...

With a hysterical little laugh, Peter grabbed his backpack and leaped out of the window.

.....

Steve’s night was going great. After a quick make over from the Winter Soldier himself, the three Avengers were basically unrecognizable. They had gotten a few weird looks at the pub they went to, but maybe that was because Steve and Bucky had both ordered two large pizzas and about eight beers each. Of course Sam was the only one drunk when they left, the other two not even feeling tipsy. They had decided to wash off the make up and take off the wigs in the bathroom before leaving, causing a little scene.

“Oh my god! That’s the funniest thing I’ve ever seen!”, Sam yelled suddenly as they were making their way back home, pulling them towards an alley.

“What do you mean?”, Steve asked, before his eyes fell on something that could actually be described as the most hilarious thing in history. Spiderman was sitting on his ass, trying to get up, his feet slipping on the frozen puddle he had landed on. Just when it looked like the masked vigilante had managed to gain control of the situation, he fell forwards, landing on his stomach with a frustrated groan.

“Stupid ice! Can’t even use my own goddamn powers! I hate this weather!”, the boy complained in a voice so high Steve wondered how they had missed the fact he was a minor for so long.

Just as he was about to call out to Spiderman, a metal hand gripped his arm. “Oh my god... Peter?”

Chapter 22

“Peter?”

He finally managed to pull himself up, just to see the amused faces of the three men he desperately wanted to avoid tonight. Bucky was looking a bit confused, Sam distracted and Steve... Peter could see the moment he registered what his friend had just revealed.

“No...”, the man whispered, taking a step closer. Peter wanted to flinch back, but he stopped himself from stepping on the ice again.

“I-I don’t know who you are talking about,” he said, trying to change his voice as much as possible.

Steve’s eyebrows drew together. “It really is you..”

“Who?”, Sam asked, swaying a little.

“Peter,” Bucky said simply as he let Sam lean against him.

“Oh.”

It was quiet for a moment, before Steve’s expression went from confusion and concern to pure rage.

“Peter! What the hell are you doing?!”

“I-I-”

“Getting your backpack? Really?! You actually ran into a burning building?! Does that mask even have any kind of air filter? You could have died!”

Peter ripped his mask off, staring the man down. “You thanked me! As you said, those kids could have gotten hurt!”

“You are a kid! I know it’s hard for you to accept, but you are just a kid! A stupid little child! What you went through doesn’t make you special!”

“Shut up! Tony literally decided to go to WARZONES after being hit by a missile! You signed up for medical experiments so you could go to war! You can’t fucking judge me!”

“Language!”, Sam giggled, earning him glares from all of them.

“I am literally from the streets, dumbass! Guess what, I don’t exactly play by your MOTHERFUCKING rules!”

Why on earth did that stupid puddle have to be directly behind him? Peter raised an arm to shoot a web and swing away, but the second he tried to go up, Steve leaped forwards.

“Oh no, you don’t!”, he said, gripping Peter’s leg and pulling him back down. “Why on earth are you out tonight anyways? It’s freezing!”

The teen let out a startled yelp and scrambled away from him as soon as he hit the ground.

“Alright!”, Bucky shouted, making Steve turn around. “That’s enough! Steve, take him,” he ordered, handing Sam over. “Peter, you come with me. We’ll meet at the tower.”

Steve tried to protest, but Bucky cut him off, making it clear there was no argument to be had.

.....

“So... Do you lay eggs?”

“Bucky!”

“What? My nephew is fighting crime in his pj’s, of course I have some questions!”

“Okay, ask. But no stupid questions!”

Bucky grinned as he looked down at the kid walking next to him. Peter had come such a long way from the scared little boy who had been hiding behind Steve and Tony when Bucky had met him in the gym just a few months ago.

“Alright. Most important one: Are you okay?”

“Sure?”, Peter shrugged. “Why do you ask?”

“I’m not exactly happy about Stevie’s reaction earlier,” Bucky grumbled. “Shouldn’t have grabbed you like that...”

“Oh,” the kid sighed. “No, I... I wasn’t scared. Not more than before.”

“But you have been scared before,” Bucky concluded.

“Yes. They weren’t meant to find out. Not yet.”

“Why?”

Peter looked down at his feet, wrapping his arms around him. Bucky wordlessly took off his jacket and draped it over the boy’s shoulders.

“I... They seem to believe I’m worth it. All the stress and work. I trust them not to hurt me, but...”

“You weren’t sure they’d look at you the same? Love you just as much?”, Bucky guessed.

“I’m not ready to be alone again. I need more time to prepare.”

“Oh Petey... Steve and Tony don’t have the ability to ever stop loving you, trust me.”

“But I lied! I’m so... difficult!”

“You are their child,” Bucky said simply, because that really said it all. “Steve told me the first night you stayed after they offered to take you in, he knew he’d do anything to protect you. The second you became theirs to look after, anything else became irrelevant.”

Peter looked down, nodding to himself. “It’s just so hard to wrap my head around. This whole... parents thing.”

“Well, good thing you got time kiddo,” Bucky said as they stopped in front of the tower. When he placed a hand on Peter’s shoulder, he noticed how much the kid was shaking, despite the huge coat

he had wrapped around his thin frame. “Jesus, let’s get you inside!”

“Actually... Uh... Uncle Bucky, could you hold me? Just for a minute?”

Bucky’s heart grew a few sizes at the trusting look in those big brown eyes. “Of course, kiddo. Come here.”

They stood there for far more than a minute, Peter safely pressed against Bucky’s chest.

.....

“Friday, close all projects.”

“Hey!”, Tony complains as he whirled around to glare at his husband. “That was unnecessary!”

“We need to talk,” Steve said far too seriously.

Tony stilled, before slowly putting his tools down, steeling himself for whatever might be going on. What had he done now? Forgotten a meeting? A birthday? Was there a larger problem? Was Steve really gonna leave him now, that they had everything they ever wanted?

“It’s about Peter.”

Oh. Oh no, this was so, so much worse.

“Is he okay?”

“I believe so,” Steve sighed, “But there is something we need to discuss.”

“Go ahead.”

“I’m not really sure where to start... I found out Spiderman’s identity,” his husband finally blurted out.

“You did?”, Tony asked surprised. “Good job, babe! Wait, the kid is fine, right?”

“He is,” Steve nodded grimly. “And before I start this story, I need you to know that he is not injured and on his way to the tower. I came to tell you because I think we need to plan our next steps very carefully. I may have had a... less than ideal reaction to him.”

“Okay? Steve, please just tell me, I’m getting really worried.”

Steve gave him another bitter smile. “We’ve been so dense... A scrawny 15-year-old kid, born in August, living with two men in New York. Who does that sound like?”

For a second Tony was confused, before he remembered what Steve had said earlier. ‘It’s about Peter.’ No. There was no way.

“You- You don’t mean...”

“Bucky is taking him home right now.”

Hot flashes of fear and anger shot through Tony’s body. “What the hell was he doing out there?! No wonder he smelled like fucking smoke that day after school. That lying little shit!”

“Tony...”

“No! No, Steve! He went too far! I- I’m gonna lock his windows or- or-”

“I know,” Steve sighed. “I know you are angry. I am too, that’s why Bucky sent me home. I guess this is our first test as parents, we can’t let him down.”

.....

Peter was sitting on his bed, anxiously waiting for Tony and Steve to burst in and start shouting. Instead, there was a soft knock.

“Come in,” he sighed, steeling himself for the conversation that lay ahead.

“Hey Peter,” Steve said as he stepped in, his voice drained of any emotion. “How are you feeling?”

Peter just shrugged, earning himself a sharp nod from Steve. “Okay then. We have a lot to discuss.”

“I know. Have you told Tony?”

“Yes.”

“He’s not here,” Peter pointed out, feeling his heart sink.

“Tony and I had a chat. We realized there are some things we need to clear up immediately. Calmly. Tony is not able to do that for you right now.”

Peter nodded, showing his hands in the front pocket of the washed out MIT hoodie. “Will he ever forgive me?”

“Yes,” Steve answered without missing a beat. “He’s upset, but he loves you and just wants to make sure you are alright.”

“And you?”, Peter dared to ask after a few seconds.

Finally the indifferent mask slipped. “Me too. I love you, son. That will never change.”

Peter felt tears starting to build in his eyes, so he quickly changes the topic. “W-What do you want to talk about first?”

Steve took a deep breath and sat down in a chair across from him. “It’s late, we are all quite upset. There are some things I need to ask, the rest we can discuss tomorrow.” He pulled out a notebook and a pencil. “Tony gave me some questions. It’s clear you are not... 100% human. So there are some things we need to clear up.”

“Ask away.”

.....

Tony was already regretting his decision. Sitting in the living room, simply staring ahead while his husband was talking to their kid was torture. Steve had already been up there for half an hour. It was driving Tony mad.

Finally there were quick steps coming down the stairs, making him jump up.

“So? What did he say? Is he okay? Should I get Bruce?”

Instead of answering, Steve pulled Tony into a hug. After a few seconds he let go, letting himself fall down in an armchair with a long groan.

“He is okay at the moment, no injuries.”

At that, Tony relaxed a bit, but Steve’s behavior was still worrying him. “What else?”

“You were right, he’s enhanced.”

“Who-?!”

“No one,” Steve said, then grimaced. “Well, technically Oscorp, but it was an accident. It happened on a school trip and they don’t even know. The process made him feel sick for a few days but was mostly painless.”

A weight lifted off Tony’s shoulders at that. Images of someone strapping their boy down and experimenting on him had been invading his thoughts since Steve had told him about his secret.

“He’s got a healing factor far stronger than mine,” Steve continued with a smile. Tony nodded, happy the boy had at least some protection.

“Petey might also be stronger and faster than me and Bucky. He also must have a lot more self control.”

“The way he caught your shield...”, Tony realized.

Steve nodded. “His metabolism is faster too.”

Tony’s world stopped spinning at that. “But- But-”

“The food issue,” Steve agreed. “He needs to eat even more than Thor.”

“But he hasn’t... Steve, have we- Have we been starving the kid?!” he shrieked, guilt wrecking his mind. He should have noticed! Peter had been eating healthy portions, but if what Steve had said was true...

“No, he’s fine,” Steve said sheepishly. “Uh... Do you remember when you found us in the kitchen?”

Of course Tony remembered that night. How could he ever forget the tears and panic on his boy’s face?

“He was upset because I walked in on him taking food. It reminded him of his foster family. Of course I explained to him it was fine, but I also pointed out that no one would ever notice if he took food from the common rooms. I just wanted to make him feel safe. I’m sorry.”

Tony knelt down next to Steve, taking his hand to press a kiss to his knuckles. “Thank you for taking care of our son.”

Steve gave him an exhausted little smile, that made something in Tony’s chest clench up. “There’s more, isn’t it?”

The tears forming in his husband’s eyes made Tony feel sick. “He can’t termo-regulate.”

When the words sunk in, Tony’s hand clenched around Steve’s fingers until his knuckles turned white. “No. No, no, no. Steve, tell me you don’t mean...”

His husband's eyes drifted to the window, which was now covered in white spots as the snow storm was raging at full force. "A night like this... No way he would have survived out there."

Without even realizing it, Tony was on his feet, storming upstairs. Peter's head snapped up as he nearly kicked the door in. Before the kid could say anything, Tony had rushed towards him, pulling him into his arms.

"Oh god. Oh Petey! I'm so glad you are okay. I love you."

"I think I actually believe you," a quiet voice whispered into his chest, making Tony fully burst into tears.

Chapter 23

Steve and Tony had a long discussion that night, not going to bed until 3 am. There were so many things to consider, but in the end they simply decided they'd have to have this conversation with Peter in the room.

"I can't lose him," Tony whispered after the safety of the darkness had settled around them. "There is nothing I'm willing to give up. Not his safety, not his trust, not his happiness... What do we do?"

"We'll figure this out," Steve told him, pulling him closer. "I'm not giving in to this awful goddamn world."

"Captain America damning the world?", Tony chuckled. "That's new."

"It's its own fault," Steve grumbled. "Homeless kids fighting crime... I'm not giving in. Not even a little bit. We will protect our son."

.....

The next day, they all settled around the kitchen table, the air between them filled with the anticipation of an incoming storm. Steve felt a lot more secure than he had last night. Tony and he had made a plan, a list of things to say and questions to ask, along with a list of things to avoid. Like yelling. Or dragging Peter upstairs and locking him in his room for eternity, safe from the horrors waiting outside the tower.

Thanks to the questions Steve had asked the night before, they at least had the reassurance that the boy was not in immediate danger. Now they just had to keep it that way.

"So... Why didn't you tell us?", Steve asked, feeling Tony's fingers tighten around his own.

Peter shrugged, not meeting either of their eyes.

"Kid, we promise we won't be angry," Tony tried,

"You'd have stopped me," Peter admitted. "Was easier this way. I- Technically you never said not to... be him. Spiderman. I did everything I was supposed to. Homework, eating enough, talking to you about stuff... It was supposed to be just for me."

"It must have been stressful to keep something so big from us," Steve commented, causing Peter to wince a little. "Spiderman usually appears at night. Have you even been sleeping?"

"I didn't go out every night...", Peter mumbled.

"Still, can't have been easy," Tony chimed in. "Why go through all that trouble?"

For a moment, Peter was silent, trying to hold back the words, but then Steve could see the last bit of resistance shatter. "I have to! It's the only thing I have... the only thing I had, before I came here. The only thing from... from before. Before she died. I've been so miserable, so afraid and depressed for so long, I don't even know who I am anymore! I- I think there is something. Below all this pain. A real person. I feel like if I let go of Spiderman, I'll let go of them too! Of who I could be."

Steve nodded, thinking back to when he came out of the ice, just to throw himself into the next battle. “And what else is there?”

Peter’s whole body collapsed in on itself, the last bit of energy seeping out of the teen. “I had my powers before. Before May died. Had I only been stronger... I have to keep going, or more people will get hurt or die. I HAVE to. It’s not even a choice.”

“Peter, this has to stop,” Tony said sternly, making the kid sink down into his chair even more.

“Not Spiderman,” the engineer quickly added, “But the self-blaming. Steve and I have talked, and we were expecting something like this. Don’t get me wrong, we are not happy about it, but we know stopping you is not the right thing to do. However, I will not allow you to tear yourself apart out of guilt, I’m already fulfilling that cliché,” he added with a dark little chuckle.

“If you want to help people and do good,” Steve took over, “That’s fine, but it IS a choice. There is no obligation. Petey, her death wasn’t your fault.”

“You don’t even know-”

“Oh but we do,” Tony cut him off. “We read the police report and saw the surveillance footage from the store across the street. We deal with tricky situations daily. On a professional level. Trust me, there is nothing you could have done. You can stop wondering about it. You are free kiddo.”

Steve had never moved so quickly in his life. The second Peter’s eyes filled with tears and he reached out, the super soldier pulled him into his arms, protectively cradling him against his chest. It took a few minutes and many gentle reassurances from Steve and Tony for Peter to calm down enough to continue their discussion.

“Knowing what Tony just told you, do you still want to be Spiderman?”, Steve asked carefully, trying to keep the hope out of his voice.

Peter nodded frantically while wiping his cheeks. “Please don’t take him away from me.”

Steve sighed. “Alright. Before we discuss the details, there is one more thing. Remember when we mentioned Dr. Willow to you?”

“The Avengers therapist?”

Tony and Steve nodded. “I know you said you needed some time to settle in first, do you think you’d like to see her now? You seem to have a lot on your mind.”

“Yes, I think I’m ready to move on.”

After that, they talked about the new rules. It took some convincing, but Peter agreed to new curfews and safety protocols. What he was much more enthusiastic about was designing a new suit with Tony. And training. Obviously also with the rest of the team, but mainly with Steve.

The Captain smiled at that. Sometimes it felt like Tony and Peter had so much in common, getting lost in their own little world. Of course he loved seeing his husband bonding with their son, but Steve couldn’t help but feel a little jealous.

However, now he knew Peter was enhanced, just like him. He could help the boy explore his abilities and limits, teaching him and learning from him all the same. Steve couldn’t wait.

Once all things were cleared up, the little family settled down in the living room to watch a few

movies. They were all exhausted from the sleepless night before, but they could feel the weight of the secrets lifting off their shoulders.

Chapter 24

“Hey dad, pass the salt?”

No. Too boring.

“How was your day, pops?”

No. Not pops.

“Goodnight, dad?”

Ugh.

“I love you, Papa.”

Too dramatic.

“Papa, dad...”, Peter started again, but stopped and shook his head, staring at his reflection. He simply couldn’t figure out how to do it. Maybe it was too early? Would it be rude if he started with ‘uncle Buck’ or ‘aunt Nat’ instead? Did Tony and Steve even care about titles like that? What if it made them uncomfortable? Did Peter even have the right?

He thought about the many times they had told him they loved him. The hugs. The way they had reacted when they had found out about Spiderman. The lack of disappointment or blame. Peter wasn’t sure if they wanted him to truly be their son, but he definitely wanted them to be his fathers.

He couldn’t ask them today, but soon.

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“Yo Penis Parker!”

Peter groaned as Ned patted him on the back, giving him an encouraging smile. Flash should be glad MJ wasn’t here. She’d tear him apart.

“Hello Flash, how are you on this very fine day?”, he asked, meeting his bully’s eyes with a bright smile.

“What the hell are you doing, Penis?”, Flash hissed, towering over him.

“Well, you are gonna be a dick no matter what I say, so I have decided to simply have a nice day.”

“I am indeed gonna have a nice day, because I am going to Jack’s party. I bet you won’t be there,” Flash grinned. “Have fun being stuck with your foster family. Hopefully they’ll give you a good smack for being so useless.”

Flash hit the floor with a hard thump, his hand flying up to his cheek.

“Dude...”, Peter whispered, looking between Ned’s still raised fist and the boy on the floor.

“Ups,” his best friend replied with a small shrug.

“We should run now,” Peter pointed out.

“Probably,” Ned replied and they took off.

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“If you want to go home, call us! Don’t get into someone’s car if they had ANY alcohol at all, you understand me?”

“Yes, Steve.”

“No drugs! I know they might seem enticing, but-”

“Actually they don’t?”, Peter pointed out, making Tony frown.

“Oh... Yeah, they don’t. I know that.”

“Watch your drink, taking drugs should be your choice at least!”, Nat shouted from the sofa across the room.

“Good point Nat!”, Steve agreed. “And maybe let that drink be non-alcoholic?”

“Let’s be realistic,” Tony mumbled quietly, making Peter smirk. The man kept forgetting about his enhanced hearing.

“Stick to your friends,” Sam added, fixing him with a serious stare.

“No one gets left behind,” Clint agreed as he dropped down in Nat’s lap.

“Remember your training,” Bucky’s low grumble joined the conversation. “You can take them down even without any weapons.”

“I think this is going in the wrong direction now...”, Steve sighed.

“Guys, I think I got this,” Peter said, trying for a reassuring smile.

“Fine,” Tony groaned. “Just be responsible, okay? We trust you.”

“And have fun!”, Steve added, earning him an angry glare from his husband.

“I promise,” Peter told them.

“Call us. If anything goes wrong, no matter what, call us,” Tony whispered as he gave him one last hug before Peter stepped back into the elevator which would take him to the garage where Happy was waiting for him.

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“Hey kid?”, Happy said as Peter climbed out of the car.

“Yeah?”

“Stop messing with your hair, you look fine. Nice outfit by the way.”

Peter looked down at his button up shirt and ripped jeans. “Thanks. D- Tony helped with it,” he quickly corrected himself, but it didn’t look like Happy had noticed his little slip up.

“Just be careful, kiddo. Channel your inner Steve, I don’t need another Tony.”

“I promise!”, Peter grinned, slammed the car door shut and turned towards the fancy house with lights flashing behind the windows. Ned was already waiting outside, giving him a thumbs up.

They went inside and Peter noticed that he actually knew most of the people there, which put his mind at ease. In the middle of the large living room stood a table with some snacks and bottles. There was beer, juice and also a huge bowl.

Ned and Peter decided to both grab some red solo cups and punch, knocking their drinks together before taking their first sips.

“I think there is alcohol in here...”, Ned pointed out.

“Definitely,” Peter agreed taking another small sip. “We should...”, he trailed off as the room started spinning. “Hey Ned? I don’t feel so good.”

.....

Steve and Tony were laying on the sofa, Steve running his hands through Tony’s hair. “He’ll be fine, Tones.”

“What if-”

“If he makes the same mistakes as you? Do you really think any of us would let that happen?”

“Well, he has me for a... a father,” Tony sighed, burying his face in his husband’s stomach.

“Which is a good thing,” Steve reassured him. “You are not Howard. You are quite the opposite, actually,” he pointed out.

“Really?”, Tony asked, allowing himself to hope just a little.

“Consider that circle broken,” Steve said with so much conviction and honesty, Tony relaxed into his arms.

“Think about it,” Steve continued. “You turned to alcohol because you saw your father do it. Did you ever have more than a glass of wine in front of the kid?”

“No...”, Tony confirmed, still feeling a little unsure.

“You acted out to get your parents’ attention, will Peter ever have to do that?”

“Just yesterday I-”

“You what?”, Steve cut him off. “Told him you couldn’t help him with his project? Didn’t you spend all afternoon today making up for it?”

“Yes...”, Tony sighed. “I just-” He was cut off by the ring of his phone. He immediately reached for it, expecting to see Peter’s name, but frowned in confusion when a different one flashed across the screen.

“Ted?”

“M-Mr. Stark, Tony, can you come pick up Peter? There is something wrong with him...”

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

I apologize for my sins.

Tony stopped the car, frantically looking around for his kid. After a few seconds, he spotted Peter, sitting on the sidewalk, slumped against his best friend. Ned had said Peter was fine, just acting weird, but seeing the boy so defenseless was a shock.

The billionaire threw open the door, hurriedly walking up to the teens. When Peter saw him, a huge smile stretched over his face.

“Dad! Dad, over here!”

Tony froze at that word, a million different feelings ripping through him. When he noticed the loopy grin and unfocused eyes, he pushed them away though. His son needed him, everything else could wait.

“Peter.... What did he take?”, Tony asked Ned, who looked just as confused as he felt.

“Nothing sir, just one cup of punch.”

“Dad!”, Peter shouted again. “Ha! That’s a funny word. Daaaad. Sounds like dead. Dead Dad. I have a dead dad. And a dead mum. And a dead aunt.” A giggle shook the boy’s body. “Eeeeveryone is dead.”

Tony just stared on in horror as Peter bent over laughing. “Has he been drugged?”

“Impossible sir,” Ned whispered sadly. “We drank from the same bowl and I feel fine. No one came even near us.”

“Fuck. I’ll have Bruce run tests as soon as possible. Will you be fine, kid?”

Ned nodded. “My mum is already on her way.”

“Let’s go home,” Tony told his kid while helping him to the car.

Once he started the car, he kept throwing worried glances over at Peter. Physically he seemed fine, just... well, high? In a way? At the moment he was playing with a piece of string he had pulled from his pants, looking absolutely delighted.

Tony cleared his throat awkwardly. “Peter, you are not alone. Steve and I are your family. We are not dead.”

“Yet!”, Peter said cheerfully, his eyes burning into the side of Tony’s face.

“Excuse me?”

“Not dead yet. You will die, though. No one can stay,” Peter paused, his voice losing some of the happiness and getting even more slurred. “At first I thought you were gonna leave me, but you

stayed. Now you have to die like them. It's me, I'm poison." He spit out the last word with enough anger to set the entire world aflame, before going back to playing with his string.

Tony didn't know what to say to that. Was Peter even going to remember any of this in the morning?

"This car... It's so expensive. It's funny how rich you are. May didn't have enough money to buy a good lock for the door to keep the robber out, and now I'm rich."

Tony sucked in a sharp breath as Peter mentioned his guilt. Steve and he had been foolish to think he was over May's death.

"I let her die and now I'm technically a billionaire." Peter broke down into giggles again. Tony waited until the kid had calmed down before replying.

"You didn't let her die, Peter. You're just a kid."

"I know," Peter sighed. "A kid. A useless kid. Won't be able to save you either."

Tony wanted to shake him and scream that it wasn't his fault until he believed him, but he was pretty sure there was nothing to be done at the moment. "You won't have to," he said simply. "It will all be okay."

They drove home in silence. Tony had Friday tell Steve what was going on so he'd be at least a little bit prepared, even though he was pretty sure there was no such thing.

Once they made it back, Tony got Peter out of the car and into the elevator. Had the whole situation not been so disturbing, it would have been cute how cuddly the boy was being.

"Oh! Look, it's Captain America! Hi Steve!", Peter cheered when the elevator door slid open.

"Peter?"

"Uh oh!", Peter frowned and turned to Tony. "He looks angry! He's super strong, did you know that?" The teen's voice turned to a whisper. "He could like... kill you with one blow."

"Kid?", Tony asked carefully, surprised by the sudden mood change.

"Did you know spider-humans heal fast, but break easily?", Peter asked casually, turning back to Steve. "Are you gonna break my bones now, Papa?"

"Peter..."

Tony winced at his husband's expression. He prayed to whoever might listen that their kid was just joking and didn't actually think that.

Peter let go of Tony's arm and stumbled past Steve towards the sofa.

"Mr. Michel broke my bones."

The boy didn't even notice both men freezing up.

"A few times actually," Peter continued. "Don't think he even noticed. They just go right back together. And apart." The boy started to hysterically laugh and almost fell off the sofa. "And together. Over and over."

“Oh Petey...”, Steve whispered and took a step towards him, but froze again when the kid continues talking.

“I had this Captain America comic. My favorite. He found it. You know what he said?”

No. Oh please no. Every protective instinct inside Tony was roaring, but there was nothing he could do.

“He said: ‘Your precious Steve Rogers would hit you harder than this!’”, Peter recited in a fake deep voice. “It’s like I was prepared to meet you.”, he giggled, grinning up at a very pale Steve Rogers.

The kid swung his legs around to get himself in an upright position, which almost made him fall over again. He turned to Tony, who suddenly felt like throwing up. What horrible truth would he reveal about their relationship?

“They always said they would find and kill me if I left. You could do that, right? Find me anywhere? No one could escape from you.”

“Pete...”, Tony choked out, desperately reaching out for his child but too scared to move.

“Always thought they would come for me, but you found me instead,” Peter said, glancing at Steve. “You are so... nice,” he sank back into the cushions. “I don’t get it. It’s nice. It’s nice you’re nice. Everything is so nice here. And soft,” the kid yawned.

Confident the teen was done with spilling terrors like a damn waterfall, Tony finally moved to his side, helping him roll his side and put his head down on a pillow. He threw a hesitant look at Steve, who was still blankly staring into space. This would take a while to fix.

“You tired, baby?”, Tony asked brushing his boy’s hair away from his sweaty forehead.

“No.”

“That’s a lie,” Tony chuckles softly.

Peter lifted his head up enough to pull himself into Tony’s lap. “Wanna stay with you, dad.”

The man’s fingers glided through his son’s hair as he buried his face in Tony’s stomach. “I’ve got you, son.”

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Hey! So... I know it's been a while, I got a bit distracted for a while... Also, I looked up the average length of a book recently... Turns out I wrote enough words for like 3 to 4 books in the span of 8 months? So that might explain why I felt a bit burned out and didn't have energy to do any of my homework? Oh well... Enjoy the chapter!

The world was spinning too fast. Someone needed to slow it down. Someone powerful and strong, who could do anything...

"Tony...", Peter groaned, pressing his face in the warm, firm surface he was laying on.

"Yes?", a soft voice vibrated around him.

"Can you stop the world? It's moving too fast..."

"Try opening your eyes, baby," the man chuckled. Only then Peter remembered that he indeed had eyes. And a head. A head that was pillowed on Tony's chest. His eyelids flew open, which would have been a huge mistake had the room not been so dimly lit.

"What?", Peter asked, looking around. He was definitely not in his room, but the clean white walls, cameras in the corners and high-tech equipment looked like Stark Tower. Then his eyes fell on his own body. There was a needle poking into his skin, allowing a clear liquid to enter his arm.

"No," Peter whispered, trying to pull it out, but Tony caught his hand. "Tony, I said no," he repeated, panic beginning to rise in his throat. How had he ended up here? Was it somehow connected to Spiderman? His parents had made it clear they didn't like that part of his life, but... They wouldn't just take it away from him, right?

Tony seemed to sense his mood change and gently hushed him. "It's just for hydration. If it upsets you too much, we can have Bruce remove it, but if you just rip it out, it'll start bleeding."

"I heal fast," Peter protested weakly, but didn't fight back more.

"We can't be sure of that right now."

That made the alarm bells in Peter's head ring even louder than before. Were his powers gone?

Something must have shown on his face, because Tony's turned into a frown. "Are you okay? Any pain? Do you need something?"

"What happened to me?", Peter asked, deciding to let his head fall back down on Tony's chest. It looked like right now there was nothing he could do about the situation anyways.

"Underage drinking," Tony chuckled humorless, confusing Peter even more. Then he remembered getting ready for the party, meeting Ned, taking a sip from a red solo cup...

"Oh... I didn't mean to disappoint you," Peter said honestly, his eyes beginning to sting. Had he

really messed up this badly? How? His plan had been to hang out with Ned and his team, maybe find a cool story to tell in front of MJ, not getting blackout drunk.

“Oh darling, you did nothing wrong,” Tony hummed, his hand stroking Peter’s back. “Ned told me you only had one cup. We had Bruce run some tests, apparently little spiders can’t deal with alcohol.”

“Oh,” Peter simply said, the pieces finally falling into place. It all made sense now, the odd feeling after taking the first sip, the memory loss, the infusion... Well, almost everything. “And why are you my pillow?”

Tony laughed at that. “Cause you insisted on cuddles. Can’t blame me for trying to take care of my kid. Why, would you rather have some space?”

“No,” Peter said, perhaps a little too quickly.

“Good,” Tony sighed, leaning back into the pillows. “That’s good.”

Only then Peter finally took in the hero. His eyes were bloodshot, probably from crying and lack of sleep. There were dark shadows below them and a hunted look clouding them. His hair was messy had obviously been run through and pulled in frustration many times.

“Tony... Are you okay?”

“Am I okay?”, the man shrieked. “Peter, you were poisoned!”

He shrugged. “I seem to be fine, though?”

“Are you? Are you feeling okay? Bruce said he wasn’t sure if it was going to be just like a normal hangover or-”

“I don’t know what a hangover is supposed to feel like,” Peter pointed out, “but I am doing fine. You should have slept though. You could have switched with Steve. Not fair you took the night shift on your own.”

To his surprise, Tony’s face darkened at that. “Do you really think Steve just went to bed? He’s probably pacing around in the penthouse, calling Bruce every five minutes to check on you.”

“Oh,” Peter said, repressing the urge to roll his eyes at his parents’ dramatic behavior. “Why is he not here, then?”

Tony looked away, a strange mask of dread taking over his face. For a second Peter feared something had happened to Steve, but then the man let out a deep sigh. “Steve wasn’t sure him being here would be a good idea.”

“Why...?”, Peter asked, forcing himself not to jump to ugly conclusions.

“Kid... Do you remember what you said last night?”

What he said... Oh no. A few blurry pictures and slurred sentences bounced through Peter’s brain, making him want to pass out again.

“I’m sorry,” he tried to apologize, pulling back from Tony and curling in on himself. “I’m so sorry.”

“Kiddo... There is nothing to be sorry about.”

“Then why isn’t he here?!” Peter asked, his voice breaking a bit. “I didn’t mean to upset him. I- After everything you two have said and done, I really thought he’d be okay with that word.”

“What word?”

“Don’t. Don’t make me say it.”

To Peter’s surprise, there was honest confusion in Tony’s expression. “I’m sorry kiddo, but I don’t think we are talking about the same thing?”

Peter looked away, his face already turning red. “Papa,” he whispered finally. “I- I said that to Steve, didn’t I? And I- I think I called you dad? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to do it like that. I had a whole plan, but-”

Before he could finish, Peter was wrapped up in a tight hug, his face pressed into Tony’s chest, which bounced from his uncontrolled giggles. “God, kid! We fucking loved that part.” Then the man pulled back, his expression suddenly very serious. “You planned that? It wasn’t an accident?”

“I wasn’t going to do it like that,” Peter mumbled, his ears burning with embarrassment. “I wanted to just casually say it at dinner, not while drunk.”

Tony nodded slowly, a smile spreading over his face. “You know,” he said, his voice a little hoarse, “You could still do that. Use those words at dinner. Or any time really.”

“Maybe I will,” Peter grinned back, then, a bit more serious. “Dad.”

Tony sucked in a sharp breath, nodding quickly. “Yeah, yeah, that will work.”

They just grinned at each other, until Peter realized something. “Wait, if Steve wasn’t upset about that, why isn’t he here?”

Intently Tony’s face fell. “You don’t remember?”

Peter shook his head, getting a bit scared again.

“Look... Do you remember the time your foster father found your Captain America comic book?”

Peter winced as gruesome images began flashing through his mind, his hand shooting up to his throat, as if he still had to pry the man’s fingers away. “I do,” he said sternly, then he realized what Tony meant. “Oh god... Did I tell him about that?”

The engineer nodded sadly.

“Tony... Dad... Why do I feel like the reason for Steve not being here is complete bullshit?”, Peter hissed, not believing the supposed genius had allowed this.

“Steve wasn’t sure whether or not you’d feel threatened by his presence,” Tony sighed, searching Peter’s face carefully. The teen knew he would find nothing but frustrated rage there.

“What? Now? After this many months? Is he fucking stupid? He just noticed a super soldier might be able to fuck me up real bad? Spoiler alert, I have a brain! I was aware of that right from the start! Guess who else could hurt me? Actually has hurt me before? Everyone else! Being able to do that is nothing special!”

“Kid...”

“No!”, Peter cut him off. “I’m not done! Do you even get how difficult it is to get someone’s trust after everything they did to me? That’s actually something special!”

Tony just stared at him, tears forming in his eyes, his mouth hanging slightly open.

“I am hurt,” Peter confessed finally. “I am hurt, and tired and confused and hung over and I want my fathers. Both of them, so get Steven Grant Rogers in this room right now!”

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Captain Rogers, Peter requests your presence immediately.”

Steve wasn't sure whether he wanted to sprint down the stairs or move as slowly as possible. On the one hand, he longed to make sure his son was okay, on the other hand, the soldier was terrified of facing the boy.

After what Peter had confessed last night, Steve hadn't been able to close his eyes for even a minute. He had tried to stay optimistic, but soon gave up and focused on the worst case scenario. If Peter didn't want to live with him anymore, Steve would have to let him go and support Tony from afar. The thought was incredibly depressing, but nothing mattered more than his child's happiness.

Steve paused in front of the door connecting the staircase and the medical floor. As long as he stood there, the Captain would still live in a world in which he had a son and the life of his dreams. As soon as he faced the kid, all of that could be gone.

“I advice you to hear him out,” Friday's voice echoed through the empty staircase. “That son of yours is full of surprises, Captain.”

Steve sighed. She was right. Friday was always right. He pushed open the door, and walked down the long, far too white hallway, until he landed in front of another door.

“Papa!”

Steve froze, the door handle still tightly clutched in his shaky fingers. He had expected to find his child pale and weak, maybe shaking with fear or anger. Not a bright grin and happy wave.

“Wh-What?”, Steve stuttered as he stumbled inside, his eyes darting between the amused smiles of his son and husband.

“Papa,” Peter repeated. “Dad was right, you look like you haven't slept all night! Don't you know how unhealthy that is?”

Steve almost broke down at hearing that word again. “Peter... Can I...?”, Steve asked, gesturing towards the bed.

“Come here, you stupid man,” Tony said, rolling his eyes.

Steve rushed to his two favorite boys, kneeling down so he could look at Peter. As soon as he was close enough, Peter wrapped his skinny little arms around the huge man, using his enhanced strength to pull him in. “I love you, Papa.”

“I love you too, my son,” Steve whispered back, tears finally escaping his eyes.

They just sat in silence for a while, until Peter hesitantly let go. “Look, about what I said last night...”

“Is it true?”, Steve asked, unable to keep the hope out of his voice. Maybe he had simply misunderstood?

“It is,” Tony confirmed when Peter just looked away. “but Stevie, that doesn’t mean anything has to change.”

“But-”

“He’s right,” the kid cut him off. “Nothing changes. The past happened, you knowing doesn’t change anything. I trust you, Papa.”

“Thank you,” Steve said, emotion almost choking his words off completely. “Nothing could make me prouder.”

They sat in silence again, until Steve couldn’t keep back the worries anymore. “Do you think about these things a lot? Is that why you brought it up?”

“No...”, Peter sighed. “Not until recently.”

“What changed?”, Tony asked.

“Therapy. I- I think it’s good for me, but it means I can’t just ignore the past anymore. I’m so used to pushing things away, actually thinking about them can be a bit... much. Guess that’s why it just came out,” Peter shrugged, his fingers nervously playing with the blanket.

“Is it too much?”, Steve asked, brushing a bit of hair away from the kid’s forehead.

“No,” Peter decided after a few seconds. “I think... I think I am finally healing.”

.....

Peter had been right. He was getting better. In the following weeks and months, he started talking about a few of the things his former foster parents had done, but also about what he missed about May. Steve and Tony in turn learned that they couldn’t fix him, just hold their son close and love him.

Both Bucky and Rhody almost cried when they were addressed as uncles for the first time. Bruce almost dropped the sample he was holding, but quickly got his emotions under control. Clint and Thor both cheered and hugged Peter, before running off to bake a cake to celebrate. It turned out to be a complete disaster of course, but no one managed to be angry at their antics. Sam had heard the title many times before, so he only beamed at Peter and rubbed Bucky’s back, who looked like he was going to cry again. Natasha and Pepper acted like being addressed as aunts it was no big deal, but each of them disappeared afterwards and came back soon bearing gifts for Peter and with slightly red and puffy eyes.

After so many changes and revelations, their life suddenly felt very... quiet. Almost mundane, even though they were the least mundane people imaginable. There were fights over what movie they should watch, complaints about Peter staying out too long, family dinners, rushed breakfasts before school, tight goodbye and hello hugs and many happy, normal days. Life was simply life, and it was a happy one. Finally, they were a family.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I’ve decided to end this story. There will be a short sequel, because I love the ‘field trip at SI’ trope. I’ve got some other things I want to write, I think I’ll post

maybe once a week?

I hope you enjoyed this story and thanks for reading!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!